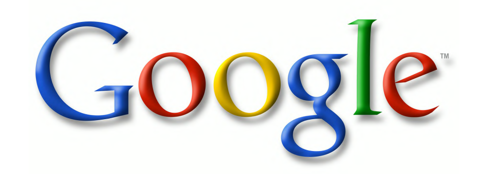
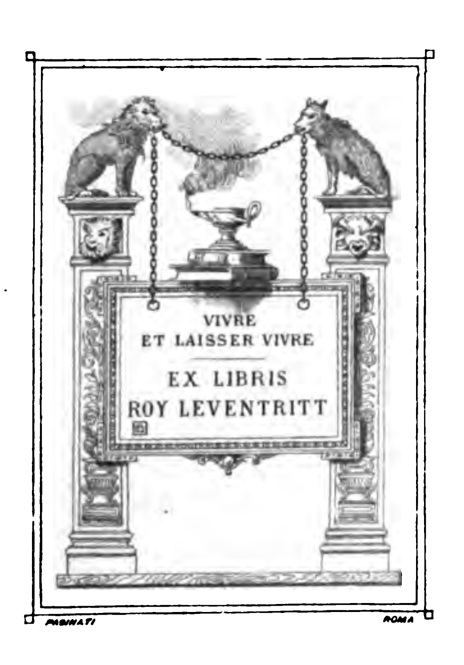



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E. TEMPLE THURSTON


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"This was the kitchen that had been Nanno's view of life for nineteen years."

Page 82.—*Traffic.*

Taken from the spot by LUKE TAYLOR, A.R.E.

TRAFFIC

The Story of a Faithful Woman

BY

E. TEMPLE THURSTON

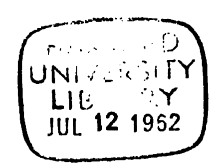
AUTHOR OF

"THE APPLE OF EDEN"



G. W. DILLINGHAM COMPANY

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Traffic

TO

W. H. P. Pollock.

CONTENTS.

BOOK I.

THE LOVE-CHILD.

BOOK II.

HOLY MATRIMONY.

BOOK III.

THE WORLD, THE FLESH, AND THE LAW.

BOOK IV.

THE CROSS-ROADS.

BOOK V.

THE UPLIFTED HAND.

BOOK VI.

THE END OF THE TRAFFIC.

BOOK I.

THE LOVE-CHILD.

". . . For no kind of traffic
Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
And use of service, none; contract, successsion,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil
No occupation; all men idle, all;
And women too,—but innocent and pure;
No sovereignty."—Act II, scene 1.—*The Tempest.*

TRAFFIC.

CHAPTER I.

THE sun which had been white with heat all day, was growing deeper and deeper in a tone of orange; and as though some unseen hand were plunging it again into the bowels of a furnace, it sank slowly behind the horizon. Long strands of purplish clouds, rimmed with palest gold, stretched across a sky of primrose, and in the east, great banks of cumulus clouds were lit with cream and pink, like snow-capped mountains lifting their rounded peaks into the unknown. A haze of gold hung about the land in a mist; every tree or bush that rose up before the sun was black. Evening lurked in every shadow, and the last breath of the day was almost drawn.

In the middle of autumn it was late to be driving home the cattle; yet across the fields, their tails swishing lethargically to keep off the stray flies that had followed them, their udders swinging heavily from side to side, like cumbrous bells swaying to an impotent hand, seven cows walked peacefully before a tall girl, whose rounded figure was silhouetted with impressionistic effect against the skyline.

The gait of the animals, their ambling, even motion, brought one a sense of contentment. One felt that they needed the relief of the hands that were to milk them. One inevitably realized that the day was over. When

they were out of sight, it seemed that nothing was left to be done.

In the girl herself this sense had imparted itself as well. Occasionally she laid a light hand upon the hind-quarters of the last cow as it lagged behind. But she gave them no word of command. In her eyes as she came nearer you could see the reflected light of the sunset. It tinted her face with a deep russet red and added to the color of her lips. Her hands that swung by her side were of the same deep shade, and her hair that was brown looked almost black in the half light.

By the side of a gap in a wall of grass-sod and stone, a man was crouching with a gun on his knee. She was bound to pass through that way. The field had no other egress beyond the gate at the farther end by which she had entered. And so he waited and watched her.

The solitary man who awaits the approach of a solitary woman, whether she be peasant, lady or sprite, will accord her a share of interest which only the state of circumstances can reasonably guarantee. His thoughts will be drawn towards her as though she might be the only woman in the world, which, in fact, as far as his horizon is concerned, she is. There is some instinct which is almost primeval—certainly animal—that stirs in his mind. The spirit of competition drives many men; but the law of nature leads one and all of them, blindfolded, by the hand.

The man with the gun altered his position in order to be able to see her better. He speculated on her appearance from the frayed black outline that he saw. He wondered vaguely if she would start when she came through the gap and saw him sitting there. He thought of things he might say to her; then he lowered the hammers of his gun. Just as he had done so, a rabbit started out of its burrow. He had come out to shoot rabbits. This one was not more than

thirty yards away from him. For a moment a light came into his eyes; his fingers stirred on the triggers, but he did not raise the gun. Had he been introspective he would have smiled at the control of action, but he did not notice it; his eyes returned again to the approaching figure of the girl. Nearer and nearer she came, until the forms of the foremost cattle, enlarged out of proportion by the lessened perspective, almost hid her from view.

The first cow gazed at him as it passed through the gap. The others followed its example. The last one stopped abruptly. He rose to his feet as, diminishing the distance between her and the hesitating beast, the girl came up behind it and looked to see what had caused its delay.

The man stepped back another pace, and she gazed at him with big, gray eyes. Had she been quite ordinary, quite commonplace, he would probably have said something at once. As it was, he remained silent and studied her. She was not commonplace. She was far from ordinary. In the gray eyes that surveyed him, there was a shadow of fate—a foreboding of the future that gave her a subtle distinction. She was utterly unlike her type. The essentially Irish girl of her class is round-cheeked, red-lipped, and heavy-eyed; there is a daring in her glance, but in this girl's there was none; only the suggestion of submission to some power greater than her own. The essentially Irish girl has the attractions of the moment. This girl possessed that fascination which does not insist or compel, but which grows between the moments of forgetfulness.

To the reader this may convey an appearance of fragility, a description that would be absolutely incorrect to apply to her. She was not fragile. She was not unformed. There is a stage in the development of a girl, when apparent development has scarcely begun. It is a phase that makes no appeal to the man whose instincts

are young enough to be healthy. This girl, no doubt prematurely, had passed that stage. She was a woman—a woman of nineteen. As she stood there, in the one moment that they looked at each other, he would, had he been asked, have described her as married. There was a subtle completion of her figure showing, certainly to little advantage, under the close-fitting bodice of homespun. Almost unhesitatingly he would have said that she was married. The life experiences of a woman mostly end with that condition. She shows it in her face; her eyes understand. And, without reasoning it, merely taking the superficial impression, it seemed to him that that understanding was to be found there in the eyes that met his.

"Are there many rabbits about this field?" he asked, endeavoring to break the silence that threatened to become awkward.

Her eyes wandered to his gun, then rose again with an unsympathetic expression to his face.

"They do burrow in the hedges," she replied. "Have ye shot any?"

"No."

The momentary contempt that showed in her face made him wince.

"I've only seen a couple. They get away rather quick, and I'm not much of a shot. Does this land belong to you?"

"'Tis me father's land."

"Where's his farm?"

She nodded her head in the direction of a white-washed, thatched building that the sun was lighting up behind a clump of trees.

"Bi the trees there," she replied; then, seeing that the cows had wandered far ahead of her, across the field, she began to move in their direction.

"Perhaps your father would object to my shooting rabbits on his land?" he suggested, walking slowly by her side.

"Shure, 'tis no harm," she said—"if ye don't hit any."

He was about to smile at the humor which he thought she intended to convey, when he saw the serious expression of her mouth. What she had said, she had meant in irony. The realization of that amazed him for a moment. There is something servile in the Irish character when brought in contact with strangers—servile as opposed to that curt aggressiveness of the English manner. This was not servile. There was something almost intellectual in the satire of it. He looked at her face, but it by no means belied the impression that her words had given. The eyes, gazing out before her over the shadowy fields, as a sailor's which rest forever on the sea, were quiet, gentle, restful. Her chin was gracefully molded, and the mouth, too large to deserve the customary epithets that befit a woman, compelled interest for its fulness of humanity. There was no irony there. Then something had offended her.

"Do *you* object, then?" he asked.

She turned her face in his direction, and he saw that he had surprised her by his question.

"'Tis the way it seems so cruel," she said softly. "Everyone treats the animals cruel round here."

"But you don't? You're fond of animals?"

"I am thin. Shure what harm are they doin'?" She spoke very gently. Sometimes it seemed as though she were talking to herself. "When I come out here in the mornin' to bring in the cows, I counts all the rabbits I sees in these fields here, and the same in the evening. They're gettin' less afraid of me than they used to be. Sometimes I sees as many as twenty rabbits."

"I suppose you think I'm a vandal?"

"What's that?"

"Well—I suppose you think I'm a brute to come out here with a gun and try and shoot 'em?"

"I dunno'—most men do it round here what have guns. They can't keep off it; 'tis their nature, I suppose."

"Do you study human nature?"

"One sees things sometimes. 'Tisn't everyone's alike, except men, when they want to kill somethin'."

He smiled.

"Do you think women are individually more different as a sex than men?"

She hesitated and gazed vaguely before her. He was drawing her into deep water. The knowledge of human nature which she possessed was instinctive, inherent; not cultivated. She could not argue about it; she could not discuss it. What she learnt was more from unconscious observation. She made no wilful study of the people about her.

He saw her hesitation; realized what it meant, and was just about to simplify his question when she spoke.

"I dunno'," she replied; "shure I dunno'."

And he understood that she had not grasped his meaning. Then he lost interest in the subject. He judged her from the standpoint of his own intellectuality—the college training of the average Englishman. By this type of rash judgment, half the interesting personalities in life are lost sight of. But the man with the gun was keener than the majority. He abandoned the contemplation of the subject of human nature, but his interest in the girl had not abated at all.

Keeping pace with the laborious movements of the cows before them, they had made but slow progress, and there

were still two more fields to cross before they reached the farmhouse where she had said that her father lived.

"Is Crowley your father's name?" he asked at length, after the pause that had followed her answer to his last question.

"'Tis not. 'Tis Troy—John Troy."

"Oh—John Troy. And what's your name?"

"Nanno."

There was no trace of self-consciousness in her answer. It might have been anyone's name but her own.

"That's rather uncommon—isn't it?" he asked.

"Maybe it is. 'Tis a county Wexford name, it is—I b'lieve."

"Oh, I thought I hadn't heard it before. Nanno Troy—is that it?"

He looked up once more at her face. She nodded her head and shook loose a strand of deep earth-brown hair so that it fell on her shoulder.

"Well," he said, coming to a standstill, "I suppose you'll be going to milk the cows now?"

"I will," she replied. She pushed the loosened strand into a crevice of the mass of hair on her head.

"Then I'll say good-night."

He hesitated, then half raised his cap as he turned away.

"Good-night, sir," she said.

He looked round at her over his shoulder. Her face was once more set towards the farm and the clump of trees. It was a disappointment.

"I'll have greater respect for rabbits in the future," he called back. "You won't find me trying to shoot them any more."

She looked round and smiled. He could see the last rays of the sun in her eyes, and felt satisfied. In another

moment he had clambered over the hedge on to the road that runs to Anesk and was out of sight.

Nanno drove the cows on silently, wondering who he could have been. As she turned the animals into the last field, the figure of a small boy came out of the shadows of the trees round the house and ran to meet her. The grass rattled against his bare legs like the muted crackling of firewood and, as he ran, he stooped without hesitating to pluck the blossoms off the scabii that grew everywhere.

"Is that you, Johnnie?" Nanno called. The sun had finally disappeared and the gold of the evening light was slowly waning to uncertain tones of blue and shadows of gray. It was an eerie atmosphere; hard to recognize anyone in. A frog jumping suddenly in the grass would have set anyone's heart beating.

"It is," was the answer, called in a deep boy's treble. Nanno lost sight of him then behind the cows, but in another moment the youngest member of the Troy family was beside her.

She took his hand gently.

"Did herself come back from Anesk?" she asked. The allusion was made to her mother.

"She be just afther comin'," he replied, looking over his shoulder towards the sunset and pulling on her hand.

"What did she say?"

"Shure, nothin' at all."

"Did she meet any in Anesk?"

Johnnie looked over his shoulder again.

"She did I suppose. I dunno. She did av course." For the third time he pulled on her hand.

"What are ye starin' at over there?" she asked curiously.

"The crocidile."

"What crocidile?"

He stopped and turned her round with him, pointing towards the sunset.

"There's the crocidile." His finger indicated a long purple cloud that was lying in the primrose sky. The faint murmuring of distant breaths of wind had blown it to the grotesque shape which he saw. "D'ye see his mouth open?"

She looked down at the serious little face and the tense figure that still pointed with a rigid, dirty finger.

"Ye can almost see his teeth," she said.

"Few minutes back ye could," he informed her. "I watched thim meltin' away. I wonder how long he'll stay a crocidile. There's one over there afther changin' into a littleen lamb."

The cows were waiting patiently at the gate that led from the field into the farm. Nanno hurried forward, pushed it open, and then, one by one, their hoofs sucking in the mud as they passed through, they disappeared into the deeper shadows of the yard; and with one last look at the purple crocodile in the west, Johnnie and Nanno followed silently after them. You could hear the gate click and then a curlew called out at sea.

CHAPTER II.

Troy's Lane, which was the first boreen off the main road as you come from Rathmore to Anesk, leads up to the farm where Nanno lived. It is not uncommon for boreens, creeks, streams, hollows, in these parts of Ireland, to be called after those who live by them. John Troy's farm was the only residence adjoining the boreen; to enable him to bring his carts up to the farm from the main road the boreen had been made—accordingly it was called Troy's Lane.

From the top of the lane, finding its way out of the side of the rising ground, to the bottom where it emptied itself into the ditch on the main road, a little stream ambled; chattering prettily over the pebbles all day long. The brambles and the honeysuckle, of which the hedges at either side were mainly composed, grew over it; dipped their long arms in its shallows and made dense tunnels from which it emerged into the sunlight, chattering as ever—laughing like a little child.

Pungently smelling thyme and straggling watercress grew luxuriantly in the humid ground beside this little stream. All day long the ducks from the farm paddled up and down in its clear and sparkling water. The sound of their beaks gobbling under the surface of the stream and the incessant humming of the bees, as they hurried from one honeysuckle flower to another, were the only sounds that rose to break the absorbing stillness of that quiet spot.

On the right-hand side, as you neared the top of the boreen, an old, iron, five-barred gate, swinging laboriously on its rusty hinges, broke the uneven line of hedge, and gave entrance to the farm. There, in an open square under the shadows of the clump of trees, bounded on one side by the hedgerow, and on the other three by the farm-house itself and various linneys or outhouses, was Nanno's birthplace—Nanno's environment—where Nanno had seen the first nineteen years of her life.

The farm-house itself was a long, low, one-storeyed building. A rough, cobbled path ran in front of the house past the kitchen door with its slab stone step, and terminated abruptly in the soft, yielding, sandy mud of the farm-yard. The kitchen-door was the main, in fact, the only entrance; the kitchen itself the living-room. There was no parlor. The two bedrooms at either side made up the entire length of the principal building. And here John Troy, with his thirty acres and ten milch cows, his fields of pasture and his corn land, had made a comfortable home—that comfort, poor enough, no doubt, in comparison with the English farmer, which few men in Ireland are able to offer to a wife.

Yet all this, just nineteen years before, he had offered to Bridget Power, and the circumstances of that offering were not commonly known in Rathmore. In point of fact there was only one man besides John Troy himself who was fully aware of the details of the case, and that was Timothy Lovett, the sergeant of police. How he became acquainted with the circumstances need not be inquired into. To state the affair simply, as it occurred those nineteen years before, will be amply sufficient.

When John was thirty-one years of age, old Michael Troy, his father, had gone to his rest. There had been a merry wake. The dead had been honored by a well-

attended burial. There was nothing really to be sad about. Michael had lived to a good old age, and if the grief of some of the mourners was alcoholic, it was what one would have expected—what experience teaches one to expect.

Then John had become the owner of the farm, and from that day forward was looked upon in the village as a catch. He had only to make his choice; and—fate orders these things—that choice fell on Bridget Power, whose heart, if she might have been said to have possessed one, was elsewhere. John was a simple creature. He took his refusal in silence, and brooded over it with his pipe by his fireside. The parish priest, as is usual in these matters, was the first to hear of it. In the quiet of the confessional, with soft and unoffending voice, he gently expostulated with Bridget. It would obviously be of benefit to them all, the priest included, if she gave her consent; but she was obdurate.

The pity was that she had good looks, and the greater pity that she knew it. But perhaps the greatest pity of all lay in the fact that a young Englishman, an artist, staying in the village, became passionately aware of that prettiness himself.

Now in a country village like Rathmore, where one may walk the wild country round—across the cliffs or over dreary lowlands—without meeting a soul, tragedies may be played and lives be lost without anyone being a whit the wiser.

And so it happened with Bridget Power and her young English lover. They used to wander round the cliff path at night, the worn footway just guiding their steps in the blackness, the swishing of the sea on the rocks below warning them of their proximity to the chasms beneath. It made no matter that the grass and the sea pinks were

sodden with dew; that the whole outlook was forbidding and oppressive. The nights were black; they needed little else. And so no one knew of it; they were never seen.

There is no doubt that her hopes soared above the mere ardor of his affections. She was a good-looking girl—handsome is a better word. Her eyes were daring in those days and her ambitions daring too. She had once been in service in Lismore with a family who also possessed a house in the village and there, though she had tired of it in two years, she had seen fine ladies—or so they seemed to her—and she was well aware that pretty clothes would go far to making a fine lady of her, though not perhaps so far as she imagined. There was a coarseness in her brogue that could never be eradicated. She made use of phrases of speech and occasional curses that jarred the man's artistic mind. But it is not easy to jar the mind for long when the blood is up and the throat is dry. The remembrance may come afterwards. It came afterwards with him, and there lay the fault in her reckoning.

She had given way to him in almost everything and, with her simple calculation, it seemed that to yield him all would be to gain him for herself. So long as the world swings round women will make this cruel mistake. The power of a woman lies in what she retains. In what she yields, there lies her certain misery and regret.

There came the day; there came the moment of complete oblivion and then arose the awful realization. The chase was over; the quarry caught, as nature had intended, and it had vainly desired to be caught. But that was all. Scarcely a moment later, she realized her mistake; heard it in the simulation of his voice and knew that she had played too high; had lost an irreplaceable possession to find a curse thrust inevitably into her life.

The one memory that lingered with her beyond all the

breathless moments that had led to the crisis, was her first question to him and his reply.

"Will ye come out again to-morrow night?" she had asked; and with that forced, feeble simulation of enthusiasm in his voice he had answered:

"Yes—yes—of course. Well—I don't know. We'll settle that in the morning. I ought to do some work to-morrow."

She had risen from the damp grass and looked stonily away across the headlands to the open sea. Then her tears that followed had been prophetic. He thought that she was crying for her misdoing. A man would think like that. He would not dream of supposing that her desire was only to bind him still further. Repentance is not consistent in connection with a woman's desire to win a man. She regrets nothing until she has bound him to her. Bridget's regret lay in her knowledge that she had failed. The to-morrow never arrived for her. She had guessed that; her tears had prophesied it. When the next day came —he had gone.

Even then, when she realized the utter fruitlessness of her folly, it cannot be said that Bridget regretted her misdoing. She remained proud of her partial conquest, but her disappointment that it had not served her to further ends was none the less acute. For some weeks after the artist had left Rathmore she had endeavored to face circumstances with a bold front. The villagers had been fully aware that he had made love to her; but of the crisis and his reasons for leaving Rathmore they were completely ignorant. And so for those first few weeks she had answered all their questions with arrogant audacity. She tossed her head and her eyes were just as daring as ever, so that if there had been any suspicion as to the circumstances of the case, it was allayed.

But all this only lasted for a few weeks. For a few weeks even the most cowardly amongst us can snap our fingers in the face of Fate and whistle a tune to brave the inevitable. But the few weeks fly by. Then a night comes without sleep and the end is at hand. In the morning the back of our conceit is broken.

The reckoning had to be counted. She knew that she was trapped; trapped, as only women can be, by that pursuing hand of Judgment, which is seldom concerned with the retribution of men, but fastens itself with its iron fingers on to the shoulders of the woman and forces her like a whipped dog to the ground.

And then Bridget's manner changed. First she became subdued and then stricken and, upbraiding her again in the confessional, the parish priest showed her the material heights of her folly in not taking the honest hand of John Troy.

"Shure, God help us," he had said parenthetically, "there was a man with thurty acres of good, dacent land and a fine pot o' money in the bank at Anesk. How do I know? Shure, I dined with the manager only last week. And ye'd lose yeer head to that——" he hesitated, "that Englishman, who doesn't know who he says his prayers to, if he says any at all. Wisha, God help us!"

For a moment she had buried her face in her hands, saying nothing, and then, with that presumptuous daring which could not entirely be eradicated, she had asked:

"Like is it too late now, Father, ye mane?"

And the priest had said nothing.

CHAPTER III.

WHATEVER the parish priest had meant by his silence, Bridget interpreted it to her own advantage and, from that day forward, she began the entanglement of John Troy. A simple man, such as he was, is a straw in the hands of a woman like Bridget Power. She had lost none of her good looks; if at all, she was even more attractive and, like wheat in the hands of the thrasher, he was turned at her will.

She had admitted to him that the young artist had made love to her. She had tormented and encouraged him by the admission that she had been perfectly contented that he should do so. But he was gone—and so what did it matter? John had always wanted her; he could have her. She was his, then, from that moment if he wished.

John sat rigidly on the low stool beside his fire and pulled heavily at his pipe. It had been a late evening in September when she had come up to the farm for a can of milk, with the express purpose of seeing him and playing her last card.

For a few moments he had kept silence and then, his eyes wandering to the direction where she stood, he had watched her as she slowly withdrew a handkerchief from the folds of her bodice. Had he known that she was aware of his watching; had he known that the action itself was premeditated and intentionally delayed, he might have hesitated. But he was simple. He cared little then that

there had been others who had made love to her and, in that moment, he made up his mind.

It is foolish to say that a man has pride when he desires. Pride had little or nothing to do with it. John was as human as a man is made and somewhat simpler. He took her for what she was worth to him at the moment—not for what she was. All that, he thought, he had calculated before.

And then they were married. Bridget was able to walk through the village with her head once more erect, and her eyes as daring as ever. It mattered little to her who saw her at Mass, or whispered about her in connection with the English artist. She was Mrs. John Troy, and there was no need to show her that they were envious of her—one and all.

And at last, when the festivities of the wedding were over, she told John Troy the truth. There was no doubt in her mind as to the issue. He might curse her if he chose, and that she expected; but it would go no further than that. He was too quiet, too simple-minded to do more and, what was nearer to the point in her calculations, his nature could not afford to lose her.

The calculation was correct. She had made her books to balance. John Troy did not even curse. He sat on the three-legged stool by the fire, his face buried in his hands, and said nothing. If the truth must be known, he had guessed it; guessed it with that almost feminine intuition, which frequently comes to a man in these matters. Had she told him before their marriage, it would really have made no difference. It was no unexpected confession on her part. She may have thought she was courageous, even noble-minded, in telling him so openly—but he had known it all the time. He could never have brought himself to do without her, either before their wed-

ding or after. She had judged him well on that score. But he knew; and there lay the basis of the way in which he had accepted her admission. She might pride herself on her honesty, but here, there was no cause for pride. Nothing could have altered the fact that he had needed her; nothing could have prevented him from taking the opportunity of satisfying that need. If there were to be disaster, it would follow afterwards, when that need was supplied.

And so, when Nanno was born, he never contradicted the general belief that she was his child. Bridget had left no stone unturned to hasten the wedding after the departure of the English artist, so that suspicion never arose. For the first few years, until children of his own were brought into the world, John Troy never spoke to Nanno, or of her, unless the consideration of appearances made it compulsory.

And then his attitude to Nanno changed. It was not because his own blood had been established, or because he saw the uselessness of raging against the inevitable fate. In point of fact, it was Bridget herself who brought about the change. So long as Nanno was her only child, she had expended upon her all the natural affection of which her nature was capable. It did not consist of much; but it was sufficient to show that she was aware of her responsibility without exactly having any sentiment about it. Then came Patsy, the first boy. She preferred boy children to girls, if the matter ever called for preference in her mind. And after Patsy, Johnny arrived; then any affection that she had ever shown to Nanno was transferred to the others. Nanno was ignored—Nanno was treated with contempt. All the worries and the sins of the household were expiated by Nanno. She was beaten; she was abused; and, long before her little body was physically able, she was forced

to do work about the farm and in the kitchen which was beyond her strength.

The first time the fact came under John's notice was when he discovered her alone in the kitchen endeavoring to lift a large pail of pigs' food, and empty its contents into the cauldron, where it was to be boiled. Like an impregnable wall the cauldron raised itself some inches above her head.

For a moment he had stood and watched her little figure, disjointed by the strained efforts that she was making; one shoulder dragged down by the excessive weight, the other elevated in disproportionate contortion, as a scale that has no counterbalance to its load.

"Wisha, ye little fool," he had said, taking the bucket from her hand and with one motion of his arm lifting it above the cauldron and emptying its contents into the already steaming mass.

These were the first voluntary words that he had ever spoken to her. For ten years, with that unswerving persistence natural to his race, he had maintained the same attitude towards her. He had been wronged, and though many another man would have vented his indignation in more violent measures, he had never forgotten it until then.

He would probably have remembered it and returned to his same attitude again, had not Bridget at that moment entered from the dairy.

"In the name o' God!" she exclaimed, seeing what he was doing, "is it slopping about in the kitchen ye are now, instead o' tendin' ye're own business?"

"Shure the choild's not shtrong enough to be liftin' thim things," he replied quietly. "If ye want a girrl to help, why don't ye say so?"

Bridget looked at him in amazement.

"Glory be to God! Not shtrong enough? That choild? Faith, ye're getting moighty considheration out of yeerself. Go an' fill the bucket again, Nanno— an' doant be shtandin' shtarin' at him."

"I'll fill the bucket meself," said John, carrying it out of the room.

As soon as he had gone Bridget had approached Nanno menacingly; then had followed the thud of her blow on the child's head, as she drove her out of the kitchen to feed the chickens in the yard.

After this day, whenever he could, John helped her with the laborious work that had been set for her to do. Whenever he could escape from the house without being seen, he would follow her in the dusk of the evening, or the faint light of the early morning, and assist her in the bringing in of the cows. At these times her gray eyes would watch him wonderingly, and at first neither he nor Nanno could understand this gradual change. They both marveled at it in their different ways; but when one evening, as they were driving home the cows to be milked, he had bent down and taken her little hand in his, there had seemed no further need for explanation—both were satisfied.

Of the circumstances of her birth, Nanno had never been told; but this was through no special desire of her mother's. Many times, since their hostility to each other had first commenced, Bridget had had it on the tip of her tongue to hurl the fact in the face of the unoffending child. Frequently, however, in speaking to her husband of Nanno, she would make no endeavor to refer reticently to the illegitimacy of her birth.

"'Tis aiqual to the deuce what that young bastard be doin'!" she had exclaimed one day in a fit of rage to her husband.

John Troy stood up in righteous anger and ran his horny fingers through his hair.

"D'ye mind this," he said warningly, "ye ungrateful woman, ye! When I married ye, an' faith, 'twas a damned queer thing to do—I was afther makin' that choild me own; an' by God—if I hear ye tellin' her or anyone else that she's not my choild bi the law—by God, I'll break yeer head open—I will so!"

For the first time in her life Bridget had been afraid of her husband, and she had said no more. She did not abate her cruel treatment to Nanno; in fact, the child suffered the more in private from the wrath that consequently descended upon her shoulders; but she curbed her inclination to shame her as had often been her intention before.

And so, even at nineteen years of age, no word of her birth had reached Nanno's ears; yet the mark of it was stamped indelibly in her face. The hand of misfortune had already molded the expression of her mouth; there was fatality in the color of her lips. The desire of men was bound to turn to them. Even her eyes seemed shadowed with that trouble and disaster which had attended her life from its very birth. She had, in fact, received but few, indeed, of her mother's characteristics. Where she did not resemble her father, her nature seemed to have absorbed that spirit of sensuousness which had dominated her parents in their intimacy. It had not as yet developed itself in her manner; there was no shadow of it, even in her thoughts. But the seductive charm of it was there, apparent in her face.

There is no doubt about the sins of the fathers falling upon the generation in the case of an illegitimate child. No book has ever been written, no law has ever been made—there is not one dissentient voice in the chorus of

rebuke, not one hand to help or one lamp to lead the way, when a love-child is cast into the world. There must be thousands of these nameless, ocean tramps cast away on the broad sea of existence; overloaded, until their water-line has vanished, with their cargoes of the world's contempt and their own shame. No port is home to them; no roadstead, but which is too deep for them to use their fragile anchors of hope. They must ride the seas until they sink, and the waters close over them—forgotten, disregarded—but at rest.

CHAPTER IV.

So it was that Nanno was different from her class. Her mother saw it. The consciousness of it at times irritated her unreasonably. Whenever she observed a refinement of sentiment in Nanno, she would ridicule it with native sarcasm; but she was well aware of its derivation. There were times when something that Nanno did would call vividly to her mind the remembrance of her lover, and then her anger would rise at the recollection of her failure and his desertion.

It was not so much the characteristics of her father that Nanno possessed—there was no small-mindedness, no cowardice, in her nature—but rather his mannerisms and that delicacy of feeling which only education and inheritance can bring with them.

There were many times when Bridget could see, despite herself, that Nanno would be susceptible to the slightest refining influence; that she would soon find her foothold in better surroundings; but all this only rankled in her mind the more.

When she returned that evening with the cows; when the gate had shut, and, following the indolent beasts, Nanno had come into the farm-yard, where a ray of light from the east had fallen through the trees and lit up her face; Bridget, who was waiting in the doorway, had seen again that difference, that aloofness to her surroundings in her which nothing could eradicate. And seeing it, her temper overcame her.

"'Tis fine and late ye are. What's been happenin' ye in the name o' God?"

Her voice sounded rawkish in the still air of the evening and, because of the silence that followed her question, the rawkishness was intensified.

Nanno stood watching the cattle as by instinct they found their way to their stalls in the shed on the other side of the yard.

"Is it dumb ye're gettin'?" insisted Bridget—"what's been happenin' ye to be so late? An' I afther comin' back from Anesk this half-hour."

"'Twas one o' the Fennels talkin' to her down in the field below."

This information was volunteered in a simple fashion by Johnny. If he had any reason at all for giving it, it was pride that one of the Fennels—a greatly respected family in Rathmore—should speak with his sister. He was quite unconscious of the effect produced by his statement.

The blood stole into Nanno's face.

"'Twas not one of the Fennels, Johnny!" she said quickly. "I've never seen the gentleman before."

Bridget looked from one to the other.

"'Tis like he's stayin' wid the Fennels thin," he asserted, in proof of his statement. "Shure I've seen him out wid them in the boat."

"Maybe 'tis Mr. Jerningham—whatever ye call him. 'Tis a friend of theirs stayin' from England."

It was Bridget who suggested this. For the moment her native curiosity had got the better of her wrath. It was the natural instinct, common to all her race, to locate a personality. The moment that she had satisfied herself in this, the remembrance of her anger returned.

"Shure, what the deuce do ye want to be wastin' yeer

time talkin' to him, an' he only makin' a fool o' ye? Patsy!"—she turned round and called the name into the kitchen—"come an' take some o' the cows; an' Nanno, ye go down the street to Crowley's. Tell him to sind up a sack o' coals and get six-pennorth o' canJles."

"Don't ye want me to do the milkin'?"

"I do not—glory be to God, wouldn't I tell ye if I did? Tell him to charge them in the bill."

Nanno walked quietly down the cobbled path and passed through the five-barred gate into the lane. The silence of her obedience almost exasperated Bridget. She often wished the girl would rebel, that she might give full vent to the embittered rage which seemed almost to dominate her thoughts of this illegitimate child of hers. Nanno was a thorn in her side. The mere sight of her frequently called forth Bridget's spleen. As year by year Nanno developed, and Bridget became older, the mother grew the more to hate the daughter. It was her folly staring her in the face; her failure gloating over her discomfiture. No one knew of it certainly, but it robbed her of the upper hand over her husband; it robbed her of the power that her nature craved.

And Nanno, unconscious of all this, only aggravated it by her unconsciousness. She aggravated it by her silence as she passed out into the lane, but she was unaware of it. Everything she did, was with that same degree of quietness. She was a fatalist in almost every action, though the word destiny or its equivalents had never entered into her vocabulary.

The evening was falling fast and the shadows of the trees were heavy and gray as she made her way down the lane to the main road. She could hear the stream between the noise of her footfalls, but its chattering seemed imbued with the neutral tones of the evening and the still-

ness of the air. Its rippling was subdued and hushed, as though it moved in sleep; but though she heard it, Nanno noticed nothing. She did not see that the fields which had been steeped in gold were then washed with gray; that the hedges which had stood out in blackness against the light, were now beginning to lose their outlines, to hide themselves in the sky.

Something that Bridget had said to her had blunted her observation. The words were hanging in her mind as a catching tune hangs in the reluctant ear. "Shure, what the deuce do ye want to be wastin' yeer time talkin' to him, an' he only makin' a fool o' ye?"

How had he tried to make a fool of her? She could not remember anything he had said, which was not quite ordinary and commonplace, except the question he had asked her which she had not perfectly understood. She knew what sort of a fool her mother alluded to; but their conversation had contained very little more than the mere passing of the time of day. It seemed to her, in summing up the matter in her mind, that her mother's thoughts ran too easily to that conclusion concerning men and women. Nanno had often heard her say it before of others. And so, at this point, she dismissed the question from her, involuntarily turning to her conversation with Jerningham. There was no doubt in her mind that that was his name. She had never known her mother to fail by her adroit questions in discovering the identity of a new-comer to the village. Nanno did not possess that curiosity herself. It was another respect in which Bridget had noticed her resemblance to her father.

Mr. Jerningham, then, was an Englishman. She had a natural distaste for the classification. Her father, John Troy, disliked Englishmen. He said, "They're so deuced shure o' things they know nothin' whativer about."

She was convinced that that was quite true, and that it applied to this man as well as to the rest. But his voice was quiet and that had appealed to her. It was not that she was jarred by the voices of those around her. Contact with them from her birth had made that impossible. But nevertheless, her ear was naturally trained to the refinement of a voice—a reed of nature tuned by God to the whispering of every wind. When he had called out after her, "I'll have greater respect for rabbits in future," she had found herself drawing inferences on his character from the way he spoke. With this remembrance she began to wonder whether he would speak to her as he had done if they happened to meet again. Why had he spoken to her at all?

That was a question which only her instinct could answer and, in such a case, instinct never fails a woman. It seldom fails a man. It may be only a glance, a hurried look, a word, a thing of the moment; it may be in crowded traffic or in a lonely lane, but the instinct that detects it is infallible. There is underlying in human nature an ability to perceive its power of fascination over another, that is as keen as the instinct to pursue the trail of its prey in the nature of an animal. A woman may glance at a man in the hurrying of a crowd, and the mind of the man becomes exultant with the knowledge of his command over her. A man may look at a woman in the silence of a church, and the heart of that woman beats with pride at the knowledge of the power that is hers.

Nanno knew why he had spoken to her. She did not reason it out; it is not in the nature of women to do these things. They understand a matter without knowing why. Nanno understood why Jerningham had spoken to her—the thought of it brought a sense of warmth to her face—but

she could have given no definite reasons for her comprehension.

And so she made her way to the village, allowing her thoughts to be absorbed by the trifling incident of her meeting with Philip Jerningham; absorbed, because it had been magnified in her mind by her mother's retort that he was endeavoring to make a fool of her.

By the time she had reached the main street the gloom had finally set in. The row of cottages on either side were lost in the gray, and the roofs were hardly distinguishable against the sky. A patch of warm, yellow lamplight fell from the window of Hannah Foley's little china-shop on to the whitewashed wall of the next house. The shadow of the window-frame divided it sharply in two. A glimmer of light pierced its way out of Willoughby's public-house. Through the door of Julia Quinn's cottage the flushed light of a fire found points of reflection in every polished surface in the room. She could see Mary Quinn, the youngest girl, turning the bellows wheel; the warm light of the glowing cinders deepening the color of her cheeks. Her head was on one side and she hummed a tune as she turned the wheel Everything was intensely quiet. A man down the street struck a match to light his pipe and the scratching sound reached her ears; then as he sheltered it in his hands the profile of his face was lit up with orange.

As she reached Crowley's shop, the universal provision store of Rathmore, a rough burst of laughter from inside reached her ears. For a moment she hesitated. She recognized the voice of the man who had laughed. Jamesy Ryan was often to be seen in Rathmore, though he lived on his farm in Glenlickey, some five miles away. And Jamesy Ryan brought a shuddering sense of disgust into Nanno's mind whenever she saw him. For some time past, whenever they met—in the street of the village or

coming away from Mass—he had gone out of his way to show her such attentions as would be calculated to express his admiration for her. To those who did not understand them, those forms of attention might have been mistaken for horse-play. They were rough, uncouth, ill-mannered at times. But to girls of her own class, and to Nanno herself, they were unmistakable. Jamesy Ryan had her in his eye, as they might have said in those parts.

He was typical of most Irish farming life. His face was round and utterly devoid of any expression, save a cunning little look here or a humorous wink there. Beyond that it was a face as expressionless as dough in the hands of a baker. It was the unhealthy purple of his skin—like many of the men in that district, he was clean-shaven—that spoke more plainly for his character than any lack of animation or want of intelligence.

He was vastly different to Crowley, the owner of the small shop to whom he was talking as Nanno entered after her momentary pause. Crowley was a man, who seemed to have no blood in him at all; rather some thin, oleaginous liquid that toiled slowly through his veins and feebly lit an interest in his eyes. Yet his face too was round; round in that flabby way which one would expect to become elliptical if placed in any other position on his shoulders. He was seldom if ever seen outside the precincts of his shop. There was the air he breathed from one year to another; an atmosphere laden with the odors of stale edibles and all unwholesomeness. Like a parasite he moved in and out amongst his kegs of butter, barrels of salted fish, and dried pigs' heads; unhealthy—unclean—yet with the great cleansing Atlantic not more than two hundred yards from his door.

Nanno approached the counter with her head averted from the two men and opened her transactions with Mrs.

Crowley who, in a filthy pink dressing-gown, was laboriously making up accounts.

"Good evenin', Nanno," she said; then looking down at her attire, she laughed stupidly with assumed embarrassment. "Ye're afther catchin' me in me dressing-gown."

This remark was made without exception to every customer, and the same people had heard it again and again. There followed no effort on her part to change the costume. She did not even offer to get it washed.

Nanno volunteered no reply. She was too engrossed in the thought of finishing her purchases and escaping from the presence of Jamesy Ryan. But escape was made impossible. Directly he saw her, he made his way down the shop and leaned over the counter by her side, professing to take a great interest in all that she required. He gazed up into her face with those small, cunning eyes of his, but for the first few moments said nothing. It was one of his ways of showing admiration.

But to Nanno, that admiration brought only the sense of loathsome foreboding. A woman always knows when Fate is following her. Again and again through her life she will see the shadow of that Fate falling slant-wise in grotesque silhouettes upon the ground. It is seldom more than once that the shadow of good fortune ever crosses her path.

Whenever she met Jamesy Ryan the shadow of her Fate lay like a fantastic symbol before Nanno's eyes and dogged her footsteps as she walked. Invariably, prompted by her instinct, she avoided it; but the instinct was not strong enough to predict in actual words the future that she feared.

As soon as her purchases were complete, she left the shop, saying good-night to Mrs. Crowley and vaguely including the others in her departure.

"She's a damned fine girrl!" exclaimed Jamesy Ryan, giving expression at length to his pent-up admiration.

"Shure, fine is it?" simpered Mrs. Crowley. "Her eyes wasn't made for the good of her soul, I'm thinkin'."

"She's a damned fine girrl!" was all that Ryan could say and, after one or two restless movements, he left the shop, as though some unseen force were dragging him against his will.

Nanno had gone no more than a few hundred paces up the street, when she heard footsteps hurrying after her. It would have been impossible to deceive her. She knew who it was. One quick little breath she drew in and then, without looking round, increased her pace. But it was quite useless; before she had passed the pump outside Hannah Foley's little china-shop, Jamesy Ryan came abreast with her.

"Ye take mighty little notice of a fella," he said, unconsciously fitting in his step with hers.

"'Tis the way I was in a hurry," said Nanno uncomfortably.

"Is it goin' home ye are?"

"I am."

"Faith, I'm goin' up the road too."

And so he accompanied her until they reached Troy's Lane.

There in the darkness Nanno stopped.

"Good-night," she said coldly.

She was just turning away when Jamesy followed her.

"Begob, I'll come up to the house wid ye," he said. "'Tis mighty dark."

At the five-barred gate she tried again to shake him off. She dreaded lest her mother should see her with him.

"'Tis good-night now, thin," she said lightly with a forced smile.

He took no notice of that.

"Why don't ye come up dancing at the cross these nights?" he asked.

"Shure, I don't have a mind for it, and that's the way with me."

He quietly moved a step nearer to her.

"I wouldn't moind havin' me arrm round yeer waist," he said sensuously.

She shuddered.

"Maybe I wouldn't like it myself," she said warmly.

"Bi God, then—how's this for it now?"

Before she could resist him he had flung his arm round her, and held her there, laughing with excitement and defiance into her face.

She wrenched herself free of him; but not before his fingers had felt the softness of her flesh beneath the homespun bodice. Then the gate opened swiftly to her hand and she left him there in the darkness, chuckling at his success and her discomfiture.

Her manner was excited and distraught as she sat down to her tea. The others had finished their meal and were sitting round the fire. She said nothing to them; but then, as she raised the cup to her lips, her sleeve caught the edge of her saucer and knocked it on to the ground, where it broke in two pieces.

Bridget broke into loud laughter.

"Glory be to God! Nanno's going to be married," she exclaimed, echoing the superstition of the country-side.

"Nanno's going to be married!" caught up Johnny in his deep treble.

And Nanno, bending down to pick up the pieces, shuddered as she had done before.

CHAPTER V.

Life in Rathmore had but one relaxation in the year: the day of the Pattern and the two or three days following, when the anniversary of the Patron Saint was kept as a feast day, and all work was suspended. Not that life there was particularly strenuous. It really needed no relaxation at all. Tending the land or fishing the sea was not permitted on Sunday. The parish priest was strict about that. Only when the weather threatened the crops, or a big school of fish came into the bay, then was dispensation granted on the Sabbath; then the nets were allowed to be cast or the corn cut and stacked.

But on the Pattern day, no matter whether it rained for twenty-four hours or the bay was alive with fish, you could get no one to work. Rathmore on that day was at play. The ever-youthful child in us must have its holiday; the Irishman his saint's day.

And it was not without its benefits, that patron day of St. Daeclan. Every cottage, small or large, was given its coat or so of whitewash or pinkwash, as the case might be, with the result that Rathmore was one of the cleanest of villages in the county of Waterford. Saint Daeclan was responsible for it all; and considering that cleanliness in Ireland is no small matter—unless it be in the existence of it—the holy man was by no means so vivid a personality to the country folk as one would have expected. True, they called their children after him; but then, in a temperance hall which had been erected on the cliff, they put up

a plaster statue of St. Patrick, whose brown beard they made gray with judicious applications of paint from the pot. Him, they called St. Daeclan, and the country people who looked in on their way to the holy well said, "Ah, shure, 'tis just like the good man—indeed it is." And, seeing that he was their patron saint, they ought to have known better. But they did not. There were few of them indeed who knew the story of the saint's life, excepting Shaughnessy, who took charge of the ruins of the round tower; and his acquaintance with it, seeing that it became a stock-in-trade which he repeated to various visitors, was not so deeply to be respected.

Nevertheless, he certainly was one man in Rathmore to whom St. Daeclan was a living personality. And Nanno was another. She never questioned that the good man had dried up the River Blackwater in the valley that runs between Anesk and Rathmore, because he had thrice been refused a salmon by a greedy fisherman. It never occurred to her to disbelieve that; for some act of disobedience, he had turned a man to stone in the cornfields that fronted the sea above the mile of strand. If she herself did not understand the means and ways of such deeds, God, by whose hand they had been accomplished, was almighty. She was perfectly contented to accept them from that standpoint.

Since all the habitations in Rathmore are whitewashed in readiness for this great event, it is easily understood that the preparations are almost as important as the function itself. For a week beforehand every cottage begins to wear a clean face. It is as though a lot of children were being set in tidiness to go before the bishop for their confirmation. Carts begin to come into the village, and the climax of excitement is reached when the traveling show arrives and begins to set up its swings.

About a week after her encounter with Jamesy Ryan, and three days before the eventful Pattern, Nanno had been sent down to the village on an errand of Bridget's. With all the rest of Rathmore, she expected company on the Pattern day. Relations came from far and near, some traveling so much as thirty or forty miles with the intention of seeing their kith and kin, making their rounds of the Holy Well, and sharing in the delights of the village.

Provisions, therefore, had to be stocked, and Nanno was sent down to Crowley's to procure them. As she turned the corner which opened the street before her, she was surprised to see a crowd of young girls collected round the door of Hannah Foley's little shop. For a moment she stopped. There was something determined in their attitudes that impressed her. She wondered what they were waiting for. Could some one inside be ill? At last curiosity prompted her to go on. None of them noticed her approach. Their eyes were all fixed on the interior of the shop.

"What is it?" she asked, approaching one of them.

The girl looked round stolidly. She was not more than seventeen years old; in fact, their ages, all the thirteen girls, ranged between fifteen and twenty-two.

"'Tis Nancy Foley," she said, and then she looked back again into the shop. Nanno followed her glance and there, she saw the girl alluded to standing by the portal of an inner door, her face in the angle of her arm, sobbing bitterly.

"What's happened her?" Nanno persisted.

"'Tis the way she's a ——," said the other in a whisper. "She hev a choild—an' she not married. Glory be to God—the shame of her!" Horror entered her voice with these last words.

"But what are ye waitin' here for?"

"To turn her out."

"Where?"

"Out of Rathmore. Is it shamin' us ye'd have her?"

Nanno looked at them; all unmarried girls who, like herself, as yet had not known the power of their own natures. Then her eyes wandered to the figure of the sobbing girl inside, and suddenly she realized the horror of it. They were going to turn her out of her own home. Her own mother was letting her go. What else indeed could she do? But they—these girls whose virtue was yet strong in them, yet whose virtue might be lost that very night—they were taking her judgment into their own hands. Not knowing what she had suffered, oblivious of the effort she may have made to guard her name, ignorant of the cruel and pressing pleasure of sin, they were about to pass upon her the sentence of their own disgust.

For one moment more Nanno gazed at them all in amazement. The same relentless look was in the eyes of each girl. It was as though an unswerving law, merciless in its irrevocability, blind in its sense of justice, was meting out judgment there before her. She felt that appeal to their pity would be useless, yet there, for that moment, drawn by an irresistible sympathy for the wretched girl, she hesitated, wondering whether it would be possible for such an appeal to be made. She did not then or afterwards try to account for that softness of her heart. It only seemed to her, as she looked from one face to another, that each one of them, she herself included, might find themselves in such a plight and pray in vain for the mercy which that girl needed then. Was theirs the mercy of God or hers?

At last she turned away, unable to watch the course of events any longer. She walked slowly down the street towards Crowley's shop, her mind contorted with the thoughts

that raced through it—a flood that twisted the placid surface of the stream into grotesque eddies.

Was life really so hard? Was sin, which seemed so close and possible a thing, never punished by the bitterness of the remorse of those who fell? Was forgiveness a quality that none possessed? The questions all tormented her with their insistence.

At length a sound of groaning from many voices made her turn and look back. Nancy Foley had come out of her house and, like a sheep that the butcher drives to the shambles, she was being turned by them out of the village. Her face was hidden in her hands as she hurried along before them and, with compassionless faces on which the implacable expression of merciless justice was set, they followed her, disappearing from sight as they turned off out of the street. In just such a manner had she seen Shaughnessy, the butcher, driving a trembling sheep away from the openness of the green fields and the blue of God's sky to that shed behind his cottage where, with nerveless hand, he cut its throat.

Then Nanno continued her way to Crowley's shop. Her mind was numbed. For the first time in her life she had realized what was the meaning of an inviolable law. She had seen it at work, and it terrified her. She had plainly appreciated the right of it; yet there was something beneath its execution which had seemed wanting in absolute justice. It did not occur to her that she was only one of the many who had wondered and thought and suffered in that very way; one of the many who would still wonder and think and suffer so long as laws are governed by human limitation. She did not ask that sin should go unpunished. It was not that she wished to avoid retribution; but only, in that moment, when she realized the fate of Nancy Foley, it seemed to her that the leaven of

human pity, of human kindness, was needed to influence the judgment between the nature of one woman and another.

Why she, as yet unsoiled by the hand of any man, should have been driven to this impulse of thought by what she had seen, is not easy to define by any law of psychology. It has been said that Nanno was a fatalist; and fatality, in truth, was at the root of it all. The mark of destiny that lay in her eyes, the hand of Fate that had laid itself upon her lips, these were not to be made evident without their shadows being cast across her thoughts.

There is something uncanny in the nature of a woman. She reads her own future with unswerving instinct, and follows her fate as a dog follows its master. Almost every story in Ireland that deals with witchcraft and the possession of the evil eye, is concerned with a woman, and the same holds good nearly the whole world over.

And so, no doubt, in Nanno, this incident had stirred the instinct she possessed. In the flight of her imagination she saw herself driven by a law that knew no mercy or restraint. She pictured herself, her face turned towards the unknown, with the hounds of an unswerving justice at her heels. And looking on into life with that clearer vision which only women possess, she dreaded its possibilities; shrank from its unpitifulness, and wondered why she had been called into its existence.

CHAPTER VI.

Three days later came the Pattern. Those of the villagers who had witnessed the expulsion of Nancy Foley had forgotten the incident, insomuch as that it was passed. They might, as in fact they did, recount it to those to whom it would be news, gossip, scandal; but beyond that, it had passed out of their lives. Only with Nanno did it remain an actual fact; still living, still horrible, still a note that had been sounded in the recesses of her mind, the echo of which would continue to vibrate until that moment when all vibration ceases and the labored swinging of the pendulum has stopped.

For two nights it had forced its way into her dreams. Women in this way are susceptible to such things. And when the Pattern day arrived, she felt in no mood to enjoy the frivolities of the occasion.

As soon as the eleven o'clock Mass was over, she made her way up to the holy well, which, with its ruins of a chapel of the fifth century, stands out of the cliff side as though, withstanding the growth of weeds around it, it held tenaciously to the right of its existence. True, only the gable end of the chapel, the high altar with its Gaelic cross and the well itself, surmounted by the three figures of Christ and the two thieves—these only had defied the wind and rain. The washed, white bones, left by the caravan of Time in the desert of men's ambitions. They stood there invincible, more than sufficient to stir the imagination of an imaginative people. And so, in commemoration

of the saint, they have become a place of prayers; prayers which are but echoes in another tongue of the supplications that were offered there fourteen hundred years ago.

Around the entire ruin, a footpath has been worn by the feet of those who have walked in childish meditation, counting the hand-worn beads of their rosary. Year after year that pathway is beaten down afresh; the grass that has grown there is worn and killed. The stone which forms the base of the cross is marked in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost by each supplicant as he ends his prayers. One by one, they approach it as they pass and, taking up the sharp-edged stone which is laid there for the purpose, they mark the sign with silently moving lips. That sign of the cross is now deep with the imprint of many a man's and many a woman's prayers. By some it is done with the gentleness of reverence, by others with the fierceness of their zeal, but one and all they wear it deeper and yet deeper as time goes by. One looks at it and wonders—which will last longest, the faith or the stone?

It had not outworn that faith which was so much a part of Nanno's nature. Each year, as the Pattern came by, she made her devotions with the same fervent reverence. They meant a great deal to her. Religion is mostly one of two things; a habit or a consolation; and to Nanno it was a consolation in the truest sense of the word. Beyond the friendship of John Troy, which, however true it may have been, was clumsy and incomplete, she received sympathy from no one. And then, also, it is within the natural order of things that the sexual development of a girl, as well as the absence of sexual gratification, draws her towards a contemplation of and a reliance on the faith in which she has been brought up. Religion was made for young girls, disappointed women, and the moral

benefit of the state; and to Nanno, at this period of her life, it constituted everything.

In company with John Troy, she made her way up to the well after the eleven o'clock Mass. The beggars who plied a substantial trade at this season of the year were seated at intervals—no doubt arranged between themselves—for some distance along the approach to the place. At the well itself, there were clusters of them. Some chose the high altar where the sign of the cross was marked on the stone. Others collected near the spot where the holy water was meted out in thick glass tumblers—holy water fed by the rain of Heaven and polluted with the washings of diseased humanity. There, were seated two poor women of the village, to whom the right of sale of the water was accorded as a charity. It was not compulsory to pay for it, certainly; but that it was holy water there was no denying, and those who partook of it, received a candid opinion of themselves from the vendors if payment was not forthcoming. As a matter of fact, every one paid. The fear of public opinion is a worthy incentive. Much the same spirit dominated the donations to the beggars. To refuse alms was to receive a curse instead of a blessing and, at the moment of having finished their devotions, these simple people dislike the sound of a curse, even though it may come from one whose prayers only soil the lips that utter them.

And so they do well, these mendicants. They know accurately the susceptibility of the natures they are dealing with. John Troy would not have the thought of refusing one of them.

"For the love an' d'onor of the Almighty God, give a copper in respect of the poor blind man. May the Mother o' God pray for the sowls of yeer father and mother, sister and brother for the love an' d'onor of the Almighty God!"

John Troy put his hand in his pocket, and the blessings of the blind man followed him—a flutter of dead leaves swept into life by a passing gust of wind— as he and Nanno walked on towards the place to make their rounds of the chapel.

"May the blissid Mother o' God give ye the benefits of yeer rounds, and may all the hairs of yeer head turn into mowld candles to light yeer sowl to glory on the last day!"

Again the simple man paid for the price of his prayers, and again, and yet again; an automatic dropping of coins into a machine that yielded its quota—nothing else.

"Will ye pray for me, now?" he said, as he gave a penny to one of them.

"Will I pray for ye? Shure, glory be to God—as long as wather runs!"

But the chances of those prayers ever being said were remote; more remote than he imagined.

To Nanno these things passed unnoticed. She was too engrossed in the thought of her own prayers. With eyes lowered on the beads that she turned through her fingers, or with her head raised and a rapt expression on her face, she walked round and round with the stream of supplicants, who, in the anticipation of the attractions of the village, were making good their devotions in the early part of the day.

They were all set prayers that she said; but though she had repeated the words a thousand times—in the quiet of the kitchen where every evening John Troy responded to the rosary—they seemed to supply every need that her mind possessed. It seldom occurred to her to say prayers of her own making. Her nature was completely dominated by those which her religion had made for her. And she obeyed it implicitly. To disobey it, to question

it, to do anything that opposed its slightest precept, was as foreign to her mind as the north wind is to the south. It was the law that governed the world—the pivot of everything that existed. Her father's sowing might cease to yield its crop; his cattle might refuse to breed their young; but her religion could never fail—to her it was indestructible.

The sea was alight with the sun as she made her rounds of the chapel that morning. Across the bay, Helvic Head slipped out into the sea—the snout of a leviathan, just cooling itself in the water. Gentle breezes of wind blew through her hair as she walked; but contemplation of the sea and thought of the day were very far from her mind. She noticed nothing. Occasionally a passer-by—one whose religious beliefs were contrary to the expression of such simple faith as this—would stop and look at her. Once two men nudged each other as she went by. She did not notice that. Such utter unconsciousness of the picture that she made was sufficiently attractive in itself. But the expression of her face was not intense. From her eyes the look of fate was for the moment gone and, in its place, reliance was predominant. Her lips, slightly parted, gave an impression of absolute confidence. She was lost in what she believed.

And so she walked and prayed until the rosary was finished, and she was standing on the rough stone that raised her to the base of the cross on the high altar. In a tender, reverent way, she took up the jagged stone that lay ready for her hand where the last person had left it; in a still more reverent way, she began to mark the cross in the well-worn groove.

"In the name of the Father—and of the Son—and of the Holy Ghost," her lips whispered; then as she looked

up, she met the eyes of Jerningham, watching her from the footpath where he stood.

The blood rushed to her cheeks. It was not that she was ashamed of being seen; but she felt that he had been watching, coldly observant of everything that she had done. It seemed as though he had found her at a disadvantage; displaying something of herself which she would never willingly have shown to any one.

She lowered her head while she was passing him, and his eyes followed her as she joined the stream of people who were leaving the place. He had come there with the cold mind of the materialist, ready to make a study of native superstition and subsequent debauchery. The supplications and the curses of the beggars seemed to him to be well within the picture. It was not necessarily a bigoted opinion. To the casual outsider, whose education has been one of dry facts and essentials, it was a conclusion almost impossible to avoid. The Irish character that is growing out of childhood is losing its faith in these simple things; but those of them who are still children can make-believe their whole life long. To them, religion is filled with its signs and wonders, and the name of God and of the Mother of God is forever on their lips in earnest supplication.

But to distinguish between this contrast, which under a slow process of evolution has now been established in the Irish character, is no easy matter; and for the first few moments, while he stood and watched them, Jerningham was carried to the conclusion which is arrived at by the majority of Englishmen who come with a protesting faith for the first time to Ireland. They call it priestcraft. They say that the priesthood thrives on the superstitions which it cultivates in the minds of the people. Jerningham was drifting in the same direction. From the stolid faces of the supplicants, he looked to the vile features of the beg-

gars, viciously, sensually exhibiting the sores and ills of their bodies and crying for alms.

What truth could there be in a religion whose pursuits were these? he asked himself. And he would have answered the question in the same way as hundreds who believe they understand Ireland have answered it for themselves before; but at that moment he saw Nanno.

Primarily his interest in the girl made him look, and then he found himself slowly being forced to the conclusion that he was at fault. Could priestcraft ever play on feelings as deep as those which he thought he saw expressed in her face?

He could not take his eyes off her. In watching the movements of her lips he forgot how they had interested him on their first meeting. They suggested some depth of feeling for which, at the moment, he was unable to account. It disarmed him. The materialist still inclined to be uppermost; but what he had seen, confused him. It was easy enough to believe that all these people were priest-ridden. With the already implanted inclination in his mind, he fancied that such was plainly to be seen in every action and every expression of their faces. But this girl —this Nanno Troy. The fact that he knew her—even so slightly as he did—seemed to give him a better opportunity of judging. And her expression dismayed him; he felt confused.

At last, when she had gone out of sight he turned away, to be met by the supplication of a beggar.

"May the Holy Mother o' God bless yer honor, and may ill-luck never stop at yeer door!"

He looked down at the depraved face of the woman and shook his head; and, as he walked away, she added an amendment to her wish:

"But fly in at the windy in handfuls—ye durrty——"

He heard no more.

CHAPTER VII.

The aftermath of the Pattern, the swings, the dancing, the parading of the village street, these things had no attraction for Nanno. As soon as her rounds of the holy well were finished she went home. John walked with her as far as the school-house, but there, though he had no definite intention of staying behind, the inclination was too strong. He saw James Crowley, the publican, playing forty-five with three of the fishermen. John could not resist that. He edged his course towards the upturned barrel upon which the four men were laying their greasy cards. As he reached them, Crowley produced the ace of hearts, recognizable more by the shape than the color of it and, at the sight of that, John stopped. Nanno had looked back for the moment and then had gone on by herself. She knew his partiality for a game of forty-five.

Men jostled her as she passed through the crowds in the narrow street, but she took little notice. Girls marching abreast, arm in arm, called out laughingly to her to join them; she smiled in reply, to some she shook her head in refusal, but she continued her way home, talking to no one.

"She's gettin' great pride out of herself," one girl said as she passed.

"Shure she's always that way shure—the divil couldn't touch her wid a pitchfork," and with their gaudy-colored dresses and ribbons they pushed their way through the crowd.

Apparently she took no interest in anything. A collection of people had gathered round a journeyman clown who, with filthy jests addressed to an imaginary comrade whom he alluded to as Billy, was making them shout with laughter; Nanno hurried by with only a side-glance in their direction.

From that moment the pace of her steps increased. In the back of the crowd, she had seen Jamesy Ryan. His face was contorted with sensual laughter, the little eyes were pinched with the wrinkled flesh; she heard the shout of his hilarity above all the others, and for that reason, lest he should see her, she hurried on.

When she reached home, the kitchen was crowded with friends, acquaintances, and far-distant relatives. They all greeted her with geniality that in some cases was genuine and in others alcoholic. The smell of intoxicants, combined with the heat of many people, almost disgusted her as she came in from the outer air.

They all sat round in the room, occupying every available seat that was to be had. Each man grasped a bottle of porter in his hand. They leaned forward with their elbows on their knees, the bottle held out in front of them. Some of the older women were drinking too, but these were supplied with glasses, the exteriors of which were all greasy and sticky with the porter that had slopped over the brim.

In every face there was a vacuous expression of enjoyment. They spoke at intervals between the gurgling sound of their drinking—animals raising their heads from the trough. Sometimes the conversation became loud and noisy. The men laughed gutturally; the women with occasional high notes, as though they had been drinking too much. On the table by the little window that looked out on to the yard were numerous empty bottles. They were

ranged in careless disorder on the board behind the men who had chosen it as a seat.

In a corner of the fireplace, under the chimney, Bridget sat on a low form and gossiped with a stout woman, whose black cape that fitted her shoulders was heavily ornamented with jet.

She was just telling Bridget how much she paid for it at Callaghan's in Anesk, when Nanno entered.

"Glory be to God, shure she's the dead spit of her father!" the stout woman exclaimed.

Bridget turned away with a coarse laugh, and urged a man who was sitting near her on the red settle to have another drop of porter. He finished hurriedly what remained in the bottle that he had and took it.

It was at times like these, that Nanno gave those around her the impression that she was morose. She felt it impossible to join in the conversation. She lacked that power of being able to give herself up to the present with the abandonment that possessed those with whom she continually came in contact.

On the little three-legged stool, which, at various turning-points in his life, John Troy had frequently sat, Nanno seated herself in the chimney-corner and silently turned the bellows wheel. For a while, after the numerous greetings were over, she escaped notice; but at last Bridget's eyes rested on her; and, whether it were those vagaries that possess a woman's mind when she has been drinking to excess, or simply that bitterness of rage which she always felt when she recognized Nanno's aloofness, she directed an attack upon her to which every one in the kitchen stopped in speaking to listen.

"What did ye want to come back here for in the name o' God? Why didn't ye stay back in the shtreet if ye can't get a word out of yeself?"

Nanno looked up in confusion.

"Maybe I didn't want to," she retorted. "There are plenty o' girls in the shtreet without me trapsin' about."

"Maybe 'tis the way ye thought yeself too good for the fellas." Bridget turned and addressed the company in general. "Glory be to God, me heart's broke thrying to pick up an ould farmer for her who'll take her wid a couple o' hundred pounds."

Every one laughed uproariously.

"Begob, there's Patsy Gee!" said one man. The suggestion was met with renewed merriment. Patsy Gee was a farmer who, in the effort of burying three wives, had reached the age of seventy-eight. "Maybe he'd thry his luck wid a fourth if she cud bring him a couple o' hundhred."

Nanno bent down, took the iron, and raked some cinders on to the pile of glowing fuel. She did not want to draw further attention to herself by getting up and leaving the room then, and so she did not even make a reply to the last sally. She was getting accustomed to this jest of her mother's about the ould farmer and the couple o' hunderd pounds. Bridget wanted to see her married; and this continual harping on the probable sum of her dowry when any one was present, was solely in the form of an advertisement.

It was for this reason that she avoided Jamesy Ryan. From his manner to her, she was fully aware that the sum of two hundred pounds would be more than sufficient temptation to him. Whenever the matter was mentioned, she knew that the moment was bound to come when the information would reach his ears and, bad character though he was well known to be, she was sure that her mother would accept him with open arms. At length, when the conversation had turned and well set in on the topic of

Nancy Foley's expulsion from Rathmore, Nanno rose quietly from her seat in the chimney-corner and slipped unnoticed out of the room.

It was time for the cows to be brought home for milking, and, more because she wanted to avoid any further reference to her marriage settlement, than because it was her duty to do so, she went across the fields to fetch them.

The evening was creeping through the trees when they were finally turned out to graze again; and then, still wishing to avoid the people in the kitchen who, as the day wore on, were becoming more noisy, more hilarious, she set out for the village.

In the gray light it would not be so difficult to avoid Jamesy Ryan. She would not have ventured there before. As she entered the street, she passed John Troy, standing, as he had seen James Crowley, with three other men round the upturned barrel. His simple face was flushed with excitement and with what he had been drinking. As a rule he was a temperate man. No one would ever have accused him of riotous living; but it was a saint's day and a holiday. His condition was almost inevitable. Nanno saw him lay down a card with a thud of his fist on the barrel. His eyes glittered with suppressed excitement and, with his other hand, he held his cards guardedly to his chest.

For one moment she waited, until the hand was played and then, when she realized that he had lost, when she saw his hand go unhesitatingly to his pocket, she turned away.

At the bottom of the street, by the sea-wall, where an open space gave them opportunity, the swings were placed. She would not have been human had she not been interested

in seeing the people there. And so she made her way in that direction.

The naphtha flares were hanging from different parts of the scaffolding. They had already been lighted and were casting a spluttering glare on the faces of those who stood around. Like great sweeping bats, the swings were swaying to and fro above her head in the dull blue light against the sky. The men stood up high in the seats as they rose and pulled strainingly on the woolen-covered ropes that slid between their fingers. The girls shrank in their seats, holding limply to the ropes and uttering stupid little cries as the boats swayed to and fro.

Nanno watched them with a smile on her face. For the first time that day she forgot that a fate was hanging over her. And then, even at that moment, even when she had forgotten, the expression in her eyes suddenly changed. A hand slipped through her arm and a heavy voice said:

"There'll be one o' thim bloody boats empty in a minute." And the hand still held her arm.

"I don't care for swingin', then," Nanno said hurriedly.

"Shure I don't care a damn about that—I do."

"Well, then, go an' swing by yeerself."

"I will not. Ye'll come in that boat they're after stoppin' now. Come on!" Ryan caught her again by the arm.

She looked for a moment at his face. His eyes were bloodshot, his cheeks heavy and red. It seemed to her that he would have struck her had she refused, and so she went.

For the first few minutes, he pulled violently at his rope, standing perilously upright in the fragile little vehicle and saying not a word, until they were swinging higher than any of the others. Every time the boat rose at his side, she saw his vicious-looking face, covered with perspiration

from his exertions, glaring down into hers; every time it rose at her side, she shrank into her seat lest she should fall on the top of him.

And then, when he was satisfied with the altitude which they had reached, he rose to the rope no more, but leaned forward until his face was close to hers and she felt the tainted breath from his mouth in her nostrils. She shrank from him—a sensitive plant withering before the coarseness of an unaccustomed touch.

"Ye think I'm drunk," he said at last, and his small eyes fixed themselves on her.

She said nothing.

"Maybe I've drink taken," he went on, "but I'm not drunk—by Christ, I am not! An' I'll tell ye—whisper, I'll tell ye what I'll do. I'll give up drinkin' if ye'll——"

At that second the brake was applied underneath the boat and they found themselves stopping beside another swing next them, in which was seated the man who had exerted his humor at the expense of Patsy Gee, when Bridget had spoken about her daughter's dowry.

When he saw Nanno, he laughed.

"Good man, Jamesy, bi gob!" he said. "Gettin' yeer fisht into that two hundhred pounds."

Ryan looked at him with a dull light of perception in his eyes. Then he looked at Nanno.

The swing stopped. Nanno got out quickly. The moment her feet touched the ground, she extricated herself from the tangle of ropes and scaffolding and hurried away into the darkness, where the glare of the naphtha lights had lost their penetration. Once in the crowd of people again, she felt safe. He would scarcely follow her there.

One thought only, was spurring her mind; the other aspect had entered into Jamesy Ryan's calculations. Between wanting to marry her, which was construing his pur-

pose at its best, and actually proposing for her hand, she knew that there was a lot to be overcome in his expectations. Marriage is a mercenary matter in Ireland, and the solicitor is the most important factor concerned. Occasionally a man's feelings get the better of him and he marries with his heart; but it is not often the case. To the majority, the dowry of the girl is of foremost consideration. And so, much though she knew Jamesy Ryan was attracted to her, there was always the question of the dowry to be weighed. Now at last it had been put in the balance. If her mother openly admitted to being prepared to part with two hundred pounds on the marriage of her daughter, there was every reason to suppose that when the matter came to actual barter, she would raise it at least to three. It was a large sum; larger than Nanno would ever have anticipated as being the value that Bridget put upon her. But the real point of fact in her mind, was that it was more than sufficient to bring Jamesy to a definite intention. She had felt it in the way he had regarded the man in the swing; she had known it in the way he had looked at her.

With the torture of these thoughts in her mind she followed any direction that her impulse led her, until at length, for the second time that day, she approached the holy well.

It was a vastly different spectacle from what it had been in the daytime. Contented or dissatisfied with their day's work, the beggars—tinkers as they call them in those parts—were resting from their labors. Clustered around fires burning on the ground, which threw sharp lights on their rough features, and cast weird shadows that danced and shivered on the grass behind them, they sang and drank at intervals. An old woman, seated by herself, holding tenaciously to a bottle in her lap, emitted flatulent noises

from her mouth, at which, when they heard them, the others laughed revoltingly.

Nanno thought of the prayers she had said, the prayers they had promised, and turned away in disgust. She walked a few steps and then looked around again. It appeared to her forcibly that all life was like this. She had seen it so frequently. Sin had its reaction of remorse, as well as virtue its aftermath of vice. There seemed to be no steady, even course; nothing upon which one could rely with any degree of certainty. Even the crops failed sometimes, and the cattle did not give their yield.

This was the beginning of the realization of things to Nanno. She stood there still wondering them, when out of the gloom that hung round the ruins, the light of the fires falling intermittently on his face as he passed them, she saw Jerningham striding up the cliff path.

The beggars appealed to him loudly in the name of God as he went by; even the old woman, cautiously concealing the bottle under her skirt, bid for his money in exchange for her prayers. For the first time, Nanno understood why people sometimes refused to notice them.

As he approached her, she leaned over the wall, looking out across the bay, her head averted, with the intention that he should pass her unnoticed; yet hoping against intention that he might recognize who she was.

His footsteps came nearer; they reached her, they passed her; but even in passing she thought she heard hesitation in them. And then, when she was beginning to doubt her impression, she heard him stop.

For a moment he stood still. She felt his eyes studying her, but she did not look round. At last he made up his mind. She heard him coming towards her. It was, no doubt, the delay, the sense of uncertainty at length made certain, but the blood tingled in her cheeks.

"Isn't that Nanno Troy?" he asked quietly.

She turned round.

"It is, sir."

He leaned over the wall near her.

"What are you doing here? How is it you're not down in the village with the rest of Rathmore?"

"I'm just after comin' away from it."

"Oh yes. Didn't I see you this morning at the holy well?"

"You did, sir."

"I thought so. It's a wonderful place to say one's prayers."

She looked at him questioningly and then her eyes wandered down to the encampment of beggars. He followed her look.

"Do they sleep here all night?" he asked.

"They do, sir. People won't take them in down street. They're too noisy. 'Tis a shame for them to be here anyway."

"Do you think that?"

"I do. 'Tis a sacrilege they make of the place. The parish priest ought never to leave them come there."

"I believe you're right," he said. "They're not very edifying to a heathen like me."

She looked up at his face.

"Indeed, I'm shure ye're not a heathen," she said.

"I'm afraid I am. I don't believe in holy wells and saints' days. I'm afraid I don't believe in saints at all. It seems to me that all of us who are not irredeemable sinners, are saints—more or less—mostly less, no doubt. Wouldn't you call that being a heathen of the most impossible type?"

"I would not. 'Tis because ye weren't taught that way.

No one would be after callin' ye a fool because ye didn't know how to milk a cow."

"Wouldn't they? I couldn't milk one."

"That's because ye havn't been taught."

"I expect it is. But then, if I was taught, I believe I could learn."

"Ye could—of course."

"Well you see, that's where the difference lies."

"What difference?

"I couldn't believe in saints—however much you taught me. That's why I must be a heathen."

He was trying her rather severely; but it was because, in the estimation he had formed of her, he believed that she could stand it. He found himself realizing that he would be disappointed if she could not.

"But I couldn't teach ye," she replied, after a moment's pause.

"Why not? You know everything about it?"

"Maybe I do; but like it's not a lesson that ye can learn like milkin', d'ye see. Shure I believe in saints; but I don't know anything about them. It's believin' that ye have to be taught, and shure I couldn't teach ye to believe."

He felt forcibly the gentle inference she had made that it was God alone who could teach him belief, and there was admiration in his eyes when he looked at her.

"You're a wonderful girl, Nanno," he said at last.

She looked at him with big eyes.

"What d'ye mane by—wonderful?"

He smiled.

"Well—I really mean that I've never met any one like you, and I can't understand you in the least."

"There's no call for ye to understand me."

"Yes—you're right there. Not the faintest call in the world. How long have you lived in Rathmore?"

"Since I was born."

"How long is that?"

"Nearly twenty years."

"Is that all you are? Not twenty yet?"

"Nineteen."

"Heavens! And yet there are women of your age in London who know every trick of the trade, and can play the game with their eyes shut."

She frowned: it was because she could not understand.

"What trade?" she asked. "What game?"

"Well—what is a woman's trade?"

"Shure, I dunno."

"Well—getting married I suppose—isn't it?"

"Is it?"

"I should think so. When are you going to be married?"

She remained silent.

"Haven't you made up your mind yet?" he persisted.

She looked away from him. The light of the fires touched her face.

"I don't want to marry," she replied, and he thought he saw her shiver.

"You're cold," he said. "You oughtn't to be standing out here. It's half-past nine; you ought to be getting home."

He moved away from the wall on which they had been leaning.

"I'll walk home with you, if I may."

She started in the direction of the high road that overlooks the village. It was the shortest way back. He followed her.

They passed down by the Round Tower, on the road covered by trees where the Protestant Vicarage stands. It was very dark there. It was very dark everywhere. She

compared him with Jamesy Ryan under similar circumstances. The comparison was unavoidable. This man was utterly different.

When they reached the gate in Troy's Lane, he stopped. He was just about to say something to her, when a burst of uproarious laughter from the kitchen forced its way through the gloom across the yard. It shook the darkness like a clatter of metal. It was quite unmistakable. A woman's voice mingled with it; it was Bridget's, and the laugh of a drunken woman is the essence of abandonment. One does not require to have heard it before to recognize it. Jerningham looked quickly at Nanno.

"It that why you stayed out so late?" he asked gently.

She looked at him for a moment, and then her hand stretched out for the gate.

"Good-night, sir," she said as the gate swung open.

He accepted her answer.

"Good-night, Nanno," he replied.

She turned into the yard. The blackness swallowed her up; but he still waited there, standing in the lane.

Then, as if the darkness of the place had been rent, the light of the room, as Nanno opened the kitchen door, shone out for a moment. Inside he could see men and women, firelight and guttering candles. He heard a slovenly voice calling her name; he heard the clamp of the door as it shut; and then he turned away, wondering how long she would put up with life like that; wondering what would be the end of her; wondering why, with her lips and her eyes and her hair, she had ever been born into it at all.

CHAPTER VIII.

PHILIP JERNINGHAM was a plain man—of the world, one might add; but of the world would be wrong. He lived in the world and with it; moved waist-deep in the flood of its affairs, and mixed with men every day for whom life had lost most of its sensations. To this type belong those who pamper their emotions as an epicure does his appetite; men who take a sherry and bitters before a meal and need the spectacle of a dancing woman behind the footlights before their animal passions are aroused. This type is of the world, and Jerningham did not belong to it.

His father, the owner of a small brewery in one of the Midland counties, a man to whom business for six days of the week was business, and religion for the seventh day was a rigid discipline, had brought him up with healthy instincts, plenty of fresh air, and many a sound thrashing.

At the age of thirteen, his mother, a pretty, effeminate little woman, left Mr. Jerningham, senior, to take life as it came with the under-brewer, and Philip was hurried away from home, from the local school where he was attending, to begin a course of crammed education for a University scholarship. Old Mr. Jerningham put as much faith in the winning of a scholarship as he did in the head-master's report at the end of a term. Years afterwards, when he had scraped through his terms at Oxford, and passed from a short career in a bank to the Stock Exchange, he received a letter from his mother, from whom, since he was thirteen years of age, he had heard nothing. It was a

short note, addressed from a square in Bloomsbury, begging him to come and see her.

He was at that time just thirty years of age. His father was dead; the brewery had passed into other hands and, until that moment, he had considered himself without relations of any kind worth counting. Half an hour after he had received the letter, the bell of the house in Bloomsbury was answering to his hand.

His mother was dying. She was worn to a shadow. He noticed, pathetically, the thinness of her wrists and the bones that forced themselves into prominence on her chest. She was fifty-three then, and all the light had been driven out of her eyes. She knew she was dying. She told him so; it was with the first note of cheerfulness that he had heard in her voice. Her life had been a failure, and she offered no complaints. The under-brewer had left her some years before. She told him that, with unconscious parenthesis, as though it were the most natural thing in the world for him to do.

"Did you let the pater know that?" he had asked.

She shook her head, then stretched a thin hand out across the dingy coverlet to touch his.

"I didn't let you know until—well—until now. You had your life to make. I wasn't going to hamper you with a mother."

"As far as that goes, life makes itself, mater," he had replied. "I don't believe in digging for it."

The expression of that sentiment contained the whole of his attitude towards existence. He did not believe in digging up life from the heaps and the pits where it is mostly to be found. But when it came his way, he was man and human enough not to avoid it.

In Plowden Buildings, Middle Temple, where he had chambers, there had been women to see him. Men had

drunk too much there; one man in his sitting-room, he had saved from committing suicide. All of those things were life in a way, but he had not that morbid inclination to drag it to his rooms and place it under the microscope, that is possessed by so many. The women who came that way, he treated as they would have expected to be treated; on the whole, perhaps, with infinitely more consideration. The men who drank too much, did so without forethought or premeditation. His whisky may sometimes have been better than at others, or the men more jovial. And as for the man who tried to commit suicide, Jerningham paid his passage for him out to the Cape, where the cause of his trouble could be avoided, and then he succeeded in forgetting all about him.

And this constituted life as Jerningham saw it. He did not find it morbid. At times, perhaps, it seemed serious; as when his mother had finally died, with her emaciated fingers lying in the grip of his hand. But on the whole it was interesting. There was always the struggle in the crowd, to avoid the fall of the Damoclean hammer. That interested him. More than once, he had seen the shadow of it at his feet and, looking up, had perceived it swinging above his head. And then, what came from outside, was all grist to the mill. He was a casual observer of many things; a spectator who, finding himself on the ground, makes the best of it and determines to be interested in the game.

On the Stock Exchange itself he was known as—straight. Men were glad to make a deal with him. Honesty lies mostly in the eyes; and you could find it in Jerningham's.

It was during the Oxford days, that he had become friendly with one of the young Fennels, and from that acquaintance had arisen his visit to Rathmore.

"Never been to Ireland?" Harry Fennel said to him one day, when they had met casually in the City.

"Never," Jerningham replied.

"Well then, come over this summer with me to Rathmore—my people are going there for the holidays—and I'll show you south of Ireland life fresh out of the ground, before the earth's washed off."

Jerningham had accepted the invitation.

Crossing over by Milford to Cork, he had stood on the boat, when it had reached the quay, while the luggage was being collected. An old man, who seemed to have command over every laborer within sight, was conducting the removal of cargo. His face was red with fierce excitement. His little eyes danced dangerously in his head, and his voice, always pitched on its highest key, sometimes broke into a hoarse whisper in his effort to shout louder.

"Holy Mother o' God, shift thim blasted boxes into the shtore as I tell ye! Haul away—haul away—haul away on that rope, damn ye!"

He could not keep his little body still. Knowing the name of every man who worked under him, he was everywhere at once, shouting personal commands and curses into their ears, which rose shrilly above the snorting of the donkey-engine that worked the crane.

Jerningham leaned over the taffrail and watched him with a smile until Fennel approached.

"They seem pretty free with the Mother of God over here," he said quietly.

Fennel laughed—the casual laugh of one whose judgment knows no sympathy.

"Well—it means little or nothing to them but what the priests shove down their throats."

And Jerningham had felt inclined to believe that until he met Nanno Troy.

CHAPTER IX.

THREE days had passed since the Pattern, and the daily routine which, at Troy's Farm, had been diverted from the ordinary channels, had at length settled back again into its usual grooves. Bridget had slept off the effects of the holiday, and John had suffered from dull headaches that for the time being made him silent and morose. Nearly every beggar had left the village, and all that remained of the traces of the Pattern were the spotlessly whitewashed cottages and the carts that came from Anesk to fetch away the empty bottles from the various public-houses.

To Nanno, perhaps, more than to any one, it had been a day that would not easily be forgotten. Her conversation with Jerningham, if it had not opened up new possibilities in life, had at least shown her a completely different state of existence from that which she had been accustomed to from her birth until then.

It had nothing to do with her; she knew that. She could not imagine its ever being more than a sight of something which was quite beyond her reach; a glimpse through an unsheltered window into the house of one whose fortunes and customs could never be her own. Yet there it was; she had seen it. She was not aware that it was the result of civilization, the effect of education; but she fully realized that it was different from anything she had previously experienced.

In speaking to her, as he had done on that night of the

Pattern, Jerningham had seemed to be considering her before anything else—before himself.

He had seen her shiver and asked her if she was cold. He had heard Bridget's drunken laughter, and asked her if that had driven her away from the cottage. It was absolutely unavoidable that she should compare him with Ryan. They were the two men uppermost in her thoughts. And the result of that comparison was also inevitable.

Jerningham, probably, had never been drunk in his life. She could not, in her imagination, conceive him in that condition. And then his whole manner suggested submission to her feelings; Ryan compelled the knowledge that she would be his slave. Until that moment, she had more or less considered it the ultimate circumstance of a woman's life.

All these thoughts were not the result of a contemplation of Jerningham in a light that would mean anything to her. If the suggestion ever entered her head that such a life as he would make for a woman could possibly be her own, it was only in the form of the idlest day-dream, that could never, by the remotest chance on earth, be realized.

Yet there it remained; she had seen another side of life. That as a common rule husbands drank and frequently beat their wives, she had taken for granted, and the woman who imbibed herself, generally made the best of things.

But here, was another condition of life altogether; one that seemed free from everything that was sordid; one that seemed safe and guarded from even that pitiless law which she had seen to crush the life of Nancy Foley. She could see pity in it, consideration and that sympathy which her nature felt the need of; but beyond all things, she knew it to be utterly out of her reach.

And so, when three days after the Pattern had passed, and the ordinary duties had fallen back again into their

places, Nanno was left with a definite impression that, for a greater part of her life, was an influence which could not be eradicated.

On the Saturday following the holiday, John Troy had made arrangements to cut his corn. There were five acres of it altogether, and the arrangements consisted of hiring a reaper from some neighboring farmer and collecting together, by the inducements of a barrel of porter, all the hands that he could possibly get to help him.

It was a matter that entirely depended on the weather, and when Nanno woke on that Saturday morning to find the sun streaming through her bedroom window, investing with color even the dulness of the uneven mud floor, she rose to her knees in her bed and thanked God for her father's sake that the day was fine.

At half-past six, before breakfast, they began and, until seven in the evening, the clattering whirr of the reaper, interspersed with John's ejaculations to the horses, never ceased. As the machine passed along the line of standing corn, sweeping the stalks with its relentless arms on to the unerring knives, the binders closed in and picked up their portion, binding it into sheaves with wisps drawn from the corn itself. Without speaking, and with apparent unconsciousness, the men and girls following the reaper, seemed at times to become part of the machinery itself. As regularly as a certain line of severed stalks were thrown out on to the ground by the reaper, so regularly did a girl or a man come forward and, silently picking the heap up into their arms, bind it with automatic movements into the sheaf.

Slowly and gradually as the day wore on, and the pale yellow of the corn became deep in gold with the departing light, the line of stubble grew broader and broader, the sheaves more numerous, and the upright stalks more scant. Still they worked on, cutting into the cloth of gold, leaving

only the ragged stitches behind them. At intervals, they stood erect, resting their backs when the reaper had passed and their sheaves were bound. Working at a distance of thirty feet apart down the whole line, conversation was rendered impossible. They none of them spoke.

Far away across the fields, a long strip of sea on the horizon just showed itself. It looked like a ribbon of deep blue silk, held taut across the sky. At times, when she rested, Nanno looked at it and wondered. It seemed to convey to her all the other side of life that she had found in Jerningham. Beyond that strip of blue, might easily lie another world, where all things were constant—mercy, pity, sympathy being the greatest among them.

She did not give way to these thoughts for long. There was work to be done, and God had sent a fine day on which to do it.

At one time, as she approached her portion of fallen corn, the reaper stopped. One of the men was driving in Troy's absence.

"What the hell's that?" he asked, looking over his shoulder.

A little brown object lay motionless on the ground in the wake of the machine. Nanno hurried towards it, and then a cry escaped from her lips. A hedgehog, overtaken by the relentless knives, had been cut off—lacerated. The scarlet blood, red as the deepest red of a poppy, lay in a warm mass on the mown corn—a blot of red on the gold. Nanno turned away with a sensation of nausea and horror in her throat.

Seeing what it was, the man descended from his iron perch and examined it roughly, unfeelingly.

"Faith, 'tis only a hedgehog," he said, turning it over with his foot. "Bi gob, he'd be the fella to stick the divil

inta ye, if his prickles was out. Glory be to God, there's blood for ye! It's as red as hell whativer."

Nanno bound up her sheaf mechanically. It seemed to her like the rest of life—as merciless—as cruel. It was only death after all—the most constant and certain thing that life had to offer; yet even death, in that moment, when the sun was beating down on to the golden cornfield, when the sky was a wealth of blue and the larks sang lustily above her head, looked still and awesome and unkind.

When the man had passed on and no one was looking, she carried the dead creature to the hedge that bounded the field and laid it gently in a corner where the brambles grew thickest. It was the only way she could bear to think of it. Then she went on with her work.

At seven o'clock the day was over. With the rest of the binders, intent upon the thought of their reward, Nanno walked back to the farm. She waited for them to pass through the gate into the yard and, as she stood there, she perceived a man leaning against a pillar that supported the roof of one of the out-houses, talking to Bridget. His back was turned to her, but she knew him. It was Jamesy Ryan.

So it had come at last. She knew well what his visit meant. It seemed for the moment, with the realization of it, that she could not stir. All the others had passed on into the kitchen; but Nanno could not move. A vice that overpowered her inclinations, held her there. And then, when the full understanding reached her mind, she turned away from the gate with lips that were cold and heart that beat irregularly. Without hesitation, she crossed the field at the back of the cottage. Without consideration, she clambered over the hedge into the lane and began walking quickly down towards the main road.

The only thought that prompted her was the desire to get away from the farm. She did not ask in what direction she should go; she only wanted to put a distance between her and the scene which she had just witnessed.

From force of habit, she turned towards the village and, not until she had reached the schoolmaster's cottage, which is the first habitation as you enter the main street, did she begin to collect her thoughts.

Jamesy Ryan had come to speak about her marriage to Bridget. The result of that she knew to be inevitable; Bridget would give her consent. A few months would go by, until next Shrove-tide, and then she would be Jamesy Ryan's wife. The thought terrified her; she felt her lips cold again. A thousand scenes of her married life conjured themselves up in her mind; each one was more terrible than another. She remembered the taint of his breath, as it reached her nostrils, when they were in the swings on the Pattern night. Vividly she saw his face in close proximity to her own; unsparingly she imagined the strength of his body and thought of the violence of his arms. It was as though she had been brought face to face with some street horror and, from morbid compulsion, felt driven to gaze at its nauseating details.

But what could be done? She could refuse to marry him. It came to her mind first, because it was the most obvious; but she knew well how feeble would be the power of her refusal.

Then one thing occurred to her and another. For some moments she contemplated running away; but the whole breadth of the world, with all that was unknown in it, rose up and faced her. That was frightening—terrible. At last, when every possibility seemed to be exhausted, Sister Mary and Sister Ignatius passed her on their way from the convent to some sick bed. Her eyes watched them wonder-

ingly. They were free from this horrible side of life. Their existence was one continual preparation for that after-state, which was a rest from every ill and every misery that the world could hold. Heaven was a very tangible realization to Nanno and, at that moment, it seemed very close to the quiet seclusion of a convent.

Why should she not become a nun? The sight of those two quiet figures, with their long black veils and sombre dresses, seemed then to suggest the greatest happiness that life could offer. If she became a nun, all that coarseness of existence which she had seen, for instance, so often at the Pattern, all that would be put far away from her. There was something secure, something secluded and safe in convent life. The more the thought engrossed her mind, the more beautiful it seemed.

At last, impelled by the necessity of immediate decision, she went into the chapel where, it being Saturday evening, the parish priest was hearing confession. She determined to tell him at once that she had received a vocation; and in the terror of her heart she believed it to be true.

Quite a number of people, the majority of whom were women, were waiting for a hearing, repentant of their follies on the Pattern day. Like a lot of conscience-stricken children, with heads bowed in their hands they waited for their turn; well knowing what would be said to them; well remembering what had been said to them so many times before. The parish priest sometimes lost his temper at the blind persistence of their petty sins. He had corrected them so often, and they had always seemed so willing to obedience, so attentive to his advice. Yet every year, when the Pattern had passed, they came back with the same tales of intemperance and harmless inchastity.

Choosing an empty bench near the high altar, Nanno waited until they had all gone; then, when Father Mehan,

thinking there were no more to be heard, came out of the confessional, she walked softly down the side aisle and entered the little wooden box.

Those sins—sins in her eyes—which she could think of first, she told; the priest listening with occasional grunts of gentle reproof or lenient forbearance. Confession, at that period of her life, was not conceived for such natures as Nanno's. Father Mehan, hearing the ticking of his watch in the pocket of his vest, felt strongly inclined to tell her so.

"An' there's somethin' else now I be goin' to say, Father," she said, when these little faults were enumerated.

From the sound of her voice the priest inclined his head nearer to the grating.

"An' what's that?" he asked.

"I'm after gettin' a vocation to be a nun."

For a moment, even Nanno could hear the ticking of Father Mehan's watch.

"Since when?" he asked at length.

She paused. Put in that way the truth seemed rather sudden; but she told it.

"Since to-day."

The priest coughed behind his hand.

"Is it to be a nun in the convent here?"

"It is I suppose."

"An' what put the idea inta yeer head?"

"Shure, I dunno—shure, I want to be a nun."

"An' will yeer father give ye the money."

"If he doesn't, I can be a lay sister. I'm not afraid o' doin' work. I can be a lay sister."

"Ye can," he agreed amiably, "ye can of course. An' so ye got the vocation to-day?"

"I did, Father."

"When would ye like to go into the convent?"

"As soon as I can."

"The sooner the better, I suppose?"

"Yes—I suppose that's the way with me."

"Then what is it ye're afraid of? What is it ye want to avoid? Come—come—come—there's many a slip of a girl has come here into this very confessional and told me with tears in her eyes that she wanted to be a nun. But faith, that's not the way to do it at all. Tears won't make a nun o' ye. Fallin' out with yeer mother won't make a nun o' ye. Isn't it that's what happened ye, Nanno? Bridget's been sayin' things—eh?"

Nanno felt the old terror returning to her. She dared not tell him the truth. It would prove his point immediately; and, without proof, she knew it to be the true one. Accordingly she said nothing.

"God bless us, child!" he went on, when he received no answer, "vocations for a convent don't come in a moment, after working in the field all day and falling out with yeer mother in the evening. Just ye go back home, Nanno, and make yeer mother the nicest sup o' tea she's ever had on this side o' the grave, and faith, ye won't even find the vocation under the matrass in the marnin'!"

Nanno made no reply. She knew what he said was true and, for the time, the realization of this, that she had not really received a vocation, obliterated the thought of why she had imagined it. With a feeling of despair, she rose to her feet and left the confessional, and Father Mehan, taking the stole from off his shoulders, hung it up on a little black iron peg behind him; and there was a comical smile of sympathy at the corners of his mouth.

6

CHAPTER X.

It was some time before Nanno could bring herself to go home. She walked as far as the bottom of Troy's Lane and there she stopped. The light in the back window of the kitchen just glimmered through the clump of fuchsia shrubs. By some magic of its own, it conjured up in her imagination a picture of the interior. She saw the shimmering firelight that danced in points of orange on the polished surfaces of the brass candle-sticks that stood on the shelf over the hen-coop. She saw the rows of willow-pattern plates that ranged the dresser. This was the kitchen that had been Nanno's view of life for nineteen years. Now, as she painted it for herself, the picture filled her with a shuddering sense of foreboding. Jamesy Ryan was sitting there on the table. John occupied his three-legged stool by the fire, and Bridget, with her arms folded over the ample proportions of her breast, was standing with legs apart in the center of the room. They were all talking of her. A process of bartering, preliminary to the seeking of a solicitor, was going on for her body and soul. Had the man been any other than Jamesy Ryan, she would not have considered it in that light. The custom was too common in those parts to ever call for attention from those most intimately concerned. Yet with Jamesy Ryan, the sum of her dowry rose up in exalted prominence in her eyes. It seemed to her to be the greatest factor in the whole matter, the price of her happiness, the cost of her content.

It was not that she had any fixed ideas about marriage. She knew it was her duty to her parents to relieve them of her responsibility; and, so long as the man had not been actually repulsive to her, she would not have thought of it.

But to be the wife of Jamesy Ryan; to share his life, his fortune, and his bed with him; both her body and mind shrank, like a frightened child, from the idea.

For some moments, she watched the steady glimmer of the light through the trees. It was all a supposition that Ryan was still there, but she could not bring herself even to go up the lane and ascertain whether it were true. At last, she turned along the road to Anesk. There was no definite intention in her mind as to when she would come back. Her only desire was to be by herself as long as she dared.

It was scarcely eight o'clock, but the night was as dark as it well could be. Occasionally, from the side of the road, disturbed by the sound of her footsteps, a donkey or a goat, their legs inhumanely spanselled, would hobble out of the darkness. The uneven clattering of their feet, like the rattle of gigantic dice in a gigantic box, would sound for some time after they were out of sight. She called gently to each one of them reassuringly; but they had been called to reassuringly before, and suffered for their misplaced confidence.

Not until she had reached the road that leads to the Anesk ferry, did she stop; and then, the noise of her own footsteps having ceased for the moment, she heard in the distance, coming from Rathmore, the sound of a horse and the rumble of a car. Nearer and nearer it came until, with the intense stillness of everything else, it seemed like the roll of thunder. The noise of it strung up her nerves. She wished it would pass and go away into the quiet of the night again.

At last the horse's head came into view; the horse's head, its body, and the car itself, all jumbled up into one confused mass in the darkness. When it was a little nearer, she was able to distinguish the driver—Tom Fitzgerald, one of the two car-owners in Rathmore—and the figure of another man seated opposite to him. The outline of the second man seemed familiar and, as they passed, she recognized Jerningham. A trunk was lashed to the footboard under the driver's seat, and he held a small leather bag with his hand on to the cushion that covered the well of the car. He was going away then. He was going back to England.

"Hi there!" Fitzgerald called out, as they came level with her.

She moved back a step to let the car pass, and Jerningham bent down as they went by, to see who or what it was. Then, just as Fitzgerald whipped up the horse again into a trot, he called out to him to stop and, jumping down from his seat, came back along the road to where she was standing.

"Isn't that Nanno Troy?" he asked. She saw his eyes screwed up in the endeavor to distinguish her.

"It is, sir," she said.

"By jove! I was looking about for you to-day, to say good-bye. I'm off back to England."

She said nothing. He was going back to England. She had been quite right.

"What brings you out here?" he went on. "I always seem to find you wandering about alone."

"Maybe 'tis the way I like bein' alone—I dunno. 'Tisn't everybody can be alone when they want to."

"That's a very serious observation."

"D'ye think so?"

"It sounds like it; but I'm beginning to expect them

from you. Do you remember that evening when I was trying to shoot rabbits——?"

"I do."

"You made a serious observation then."

"Did I?"

"You said every one wasn't alike except men, when they wanted to kill something."

The words came back suddenly into her memory. She looked at him, amazed that they had remained so long in his thoughts.

"Ye have a good memory for things," she said, smiling.

"Begorra—ye'll be late for the thrain, Mr. Jerningham," Fitzgerald called out from the darkness. They heard him expectorate impatiently.

Jerningham looked at Nanno. The thought came into both their minds at the same moment. Why should she not drive in with him to Anesk? She saw it in his eyes: but so faint, so indefinite was the idea to her, that he saw no reflection of it as she answered his look.

"Aisy, ye divil!" Fitzgerald could be heard saying under his breath and then, in louder voice, his face turned evidently in their direction: "Begorra, Mr. Jerningham, sorr—ye'll be afther losin' that thrain."

Jerningham stirred uneasily and looked back at the car. "Why shouldn't you drive into Anesk with me?" he said, with sudden impulse. "Fitzgerald can bring you back again."

He took a step in the direction of the car; then, seeing her hesitation, he stopped. "Don't mind saying if you think you ought not to," he added quietly.

She had hesitated certainly, but her mind was made up. Every existing circumstance forced her to the decision. She knew what was awaiting her when she returned home. She realized that this was the last she would see of the man

who, unconsciously—solely from the view of life which he had shown her—had formed an incident in her existence which she knew she would be unable to forget.

Then, too, there is an instinct in human nature which compels us to accept the generosity of circumstance. To Nanno it seemed that circumstance was generous then. The Juggernaut of her destiny was not so far off that she could afford to forego one last taste of the sun. Without questioning the wisdom of what she did, she followed Jerningham to the car.

"We're going to take Nanno into Anesk, Tom," he said lightly. "You'd better climb on to the box seat. Can you get your feet over that trunk?"

"Begorra, I can, sorr."

He glanced quickly at Nanno. She understood the look, but Jerningham did not even see it.

"Well, come along. Up you get, Nanno; there's very little time to spare."

She climbed up mechanically into the seat left vacant by Fitzgerald and then, when Jerningham was settled again, they drove off.

How it rattled and jolted—that car! Every stone that it passed over in the darkness, every hollow in the road that it crossed, seemed as though it would be the last strain that the springs could resist. Fitzgerald, with his left ear inclined towards Nanno's direction, tried vainly to catch what they were saying. His curiosity was thoroughly aroused—even he would have admitted that himself—but only a stray word here and there reached his ears. It would probably have been better had he heard everything. Give curiosity a word and leave the sentence to its imagination and the result is apt to be dangerous. Yet what they talked of, the whole world might have heard. Nanno did not try to make conversation. Her mind was too full of number-

less considerations that seemed over-burdened with importance, overloaded with concern.

For moments together she said nothing. As the trees, like witches with tattered garments, passed by them in the blackness; as the road stretched out behind, a dim gray channel in the almost impenetrable night, she felt more and more afraid to return to that state of life which she knew was being prepared for her. Every word that Jerningham said, made a contrast in her mind: every expression of his voice, a comparison.

"You're very quiet, Nanno," he said at last.

She looked away steadily beyond the horse's head that, with every step, rose and fell like an automatic contrivance, until it seemed to be dancing before her eyes. The iron-shod hoofs played a monotonous tattoo upon the hard road that fitted in its time with the uneven beating of her pulse.

"This time to-morrow I shall be in London," he continued, endeavoring to interest her.

"Ye'll be glad to be away out o' this place," she said, half in question, half assertively. "'Tis too quiet, it is."

"But that's the beauty of it—that's the beauty of it. Don't you know it's the things we don't get in this world, that we want. If you'd had thirty years of London, as I have—thirty years of noise without cessation—thirty years of perpetual motion—thirty years of trafficking with men and women and carts and omnibuses, you'd think you'd got to heaven when you reached Rathmore."

She glanced swiftly at him while he was not looking.

"Then you're sorry to be leavin'?" she asked.

"I should think I was. I never came across a place more cut out for a holiday—an absolute rest—in all my life. It's been such a complete change, you see. I never thought the world had anything so simple left to look at.

Do you remember when I saw you up at the holy well on the Pattern day?"

Nanno nodded her head.

"Well—you gave me an impression that I'd never had before."

"An' what was that?"

"Oh—I don't know. It's more or less inexplicable. I didn't know that people believed in things as I could see you did."

"'Twas what I was brought up to."

"Of course—I know that; but there are so few people who do believe what they're brought up to nowadays."

And this, more or less, was the strain of his conversation. Nanno listened attentively, she answered attentively; but it was attention that was almost mechanical. She heard everything he said with the same degree of sensation that she watched the lights of Anesk, like fireflies meshed in a black tangle of copse, growing nearer and nearer across the river Blackwater as they approached the bridge that spans the entrance of the water to the sea. It interested her to be talked to like that; but the needs of her nature predominated. She wanted sympathy, she wanted pity. She felt utterly alone. And soon, when they reached Anesk, he would be gone and she would be still more alone. With the thought of that, she concentrated her interest more closely on what he was saying. They were the last words she would hear him say. She tried to make herself remember that.

At length, when they had crossed the bridge and passed the few straggling rows of cottages outside the town, Anesk was reached. It was still some distance to the station, but Nanno said she would get down there. A feeling of sensitiveness, forbade her from allowing him to be seen

with her in the streets, where there might be many who knew her by sight.

"Shure, Tom can fetch me here when he comes back," she said, as she dismounted.

"Good-bye then, Nanno," he said slowly.

"Good-bye, sir," she replied.

"I shall probably be in Rathmore again next year."

She nodded her head mechanically. It seemed to mean nothing to her. The present outweighed the future just then, and that, she felt, was slipping away from her. She had not expected anything else, and yet, so commonplace, so ordinary had everything seemed, that she knew she was disappointed.

The car started again and she turned away to look in the window of a shop. A lump had risen in her throat.

"Oh!" she exclaimed under her breath; and for a moment she swayed unsteadily.

CHAPTER XI.

It was after ten o'clock when Nanno left the car that night at the bottom of Troy's Lane. All the questions that Fitzgerald put to her about Jerningham—and they were asked with a crafty astuteness that was amazing—she answered with a reticence that guarded itself with monosyllables.

"He's a damned fine gintleman!"

She had not replied.

"Begorra, he's got the divil's own journey in front of him!"

"He has."

"I suppose he's afther tellin' ye he was goin' to London?"

"To London, is it?"

Fitzgerald had resorted to his habit of expectoration—a habit that was customary with him whenever he was perplexed.

"Bi dad, 'twas a queer thing his askin' ye to sit up alongside of him on the car."

Again she had remained silent.

"Maybe 'twas havin' a bit o' fun wid himself, he was."

There was the inflection of a question in every remark; though not so obvious as to compel an answer.

"Some fellas are rare divils for gettin' a howlt o' girrls out o' the country." She had felt his side glance in her direction. "Begorra, though, he's a fine gintleman—an 'tis not the way he'd be doin' any harm whativer."

This was said reassuringly, as though, presuming that Nanno had allowed Jerningham to take liberties with her, he wanted to set her mind at rest. The insinuation had almost drawn a remark from her, but she controlled herself in time.

"We'd a fine day for the reapin'," she had said, trying to turn the current of conversation altogether.

"Begorra, I suppose ye had, an' faith, he'll have a foine crossin' goin' over to-night. Young Mr. Fennel was tellin' me that a power o' money goes through his hands every day. Begorra, if it came through mine I'd soon have me fisht on it—I would so."

Nanno had found it useless to change the topic, and so, until he set her down at the bottom of the lane, she had shielded herself with evasive answers that helped in no way to satisfy his curiosity.

The light was still burning in the kitchen. She watched it fearsomely as she walked up the lane. Some one was waiting up until her return, and she dreaded the thought that it was Bridget. Passing softly through the iron gate, she stopped with sudden hesitation as she approached the kitchen door. A dull mumbling of voices reached her ears, above which she could distinguish the guttural tones of John Troy. They were saying the rosary. After a moment, when she had grown accustomed to the sound, she was able to make out both Patsy's and Johnny's voices as they repeated the Hail Marys in tired, monotonous tones. Placing her ear against the latch of the door, a moment of relief brought a sigh to her lips. Bridget's voice was not amongst them. Then, bending silently to her knees, she repeated with them inside the last decade of the rosary.

"Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb—Jesus——"

The deep notes of John Troy's voice rolled the words out in subdued reverence and, with the others, her lips moving silently, she answered:

"Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

As she said the last words, alone there in the yard, the cobbles of the path grinding hard against her knees, the night clouds hovering in the black vault of the sky, it came into her mind to wonder when would be the hour of her death: whether it would come swiftly, like a sudden gift, or tortuously, slowly, with dragging steps, the sound of which grew gradually louder and louder as they approached. That it might be swift, she asked; and then, rising to her feet, she pushed the door gently open and entered the kitchen.

In the act of regaining his seat on the three-legged stool, John Troy looked up.

"God bless us, choild, where have ye been?" he asked, and Johnny and Patsy stood round with expectant faces to hear her answer.

"Herself's afther going to bed this half-hour," he added.

"What did she say about me not comin' in?"

"Shure, I dunno. What would she be sayin'?" But where have ye been?"

"'Twas the way the night was fine, an' I was tired afther the reapin'. I was out, that was all."

"But what about your tea?"

"Shure, I'm not wantin' any."

She sat down on the form under the chimney and, for a moment or so, John watched her face; then, seeing the two boys standing expectantly by, he turned on them.

"Go to bed out o' that, ye young divils—go to bed;" and, disappointedly, they stole away, taking as long over their departure as they dared.

John waited until they had closed the door behind them; then, ramming a horny finger into the bowl of the pipe which he was smoking, he sat round on the stool and gazed at Nanno.

With eyes that stared vacantly before her at the glowing cinders in the grate, she was turning the bellows wheel automatically, the leather belt clattering loosely in time to the motion of her arm.

"There's been some talk about ye here while ye were abroad," he said at length.

"'Bout me?" She looked up.

"Ay—'bout ye marrin'."

"Who?"

"Jamesy Ryan."

Nanno shut her eyes.

"That brute of a fella?" she exclaimed, with sudden impulse.

John looked at her in mild amazement. He did not like the man himself; but he was one like many another, and he had a farm of his own.

"He's hard-workin', however."

Nanno raked down some cold cinders on to the blaze, and turned the wheel vehemently.

"When he's not had too much drink taken, maybe. But I've never seen him sober yet—I have not."

John looked at her perplexed.

"But, God bless us, choild, ye want to marry some day!"

"I do not."

For a moment John was silenced by the directness of her answer. He did not know how to reply.

"Then what'll ye be doin' when Patsy grows up, in the name o' God?"

She made no answer.

"Faith, an' how about meself? Is it the way ye think I can afford to be keepin' ye?"

He did not say it unkindly. From every point of view it seemed to him the rightful, the only attitude to adopt.

She looked across the fire at him.

"But I hate the man," she said.

"Begorra, an' what's that to do with it? There's not much difference between him an' other men what I ever see."

Nanno thought of Jerningham.

"Not much difference!" she repeated.

John scratched his head.

"Well, herself's afther patchin' things up wid him. Shure—I dunno."

"What d'ye mean?"

"Well, they're afther settlin' it between 'hemselves. Faith, I hadn't much to say to it. Herself's a greater hand at managin' figures than what I am. Begorra, he wanted three hundhred wid ye—he did so; but she bate him down till there was divil a leg for him to stand on, an' he took two hundhred and thirty-wan like a pig takin' male."

Nanno listened tremblingly to all this. She knew from the beginning that it was her mother with whom she would ultimately have to deal. If they could spare two hundred and thirty-one pounds as a dowry on her wedding day, there was no doubt that they could afford to keep her for at least three or four more years. Then she could go into service: at any rate, relieve them of her responsibility. Beyond that, she did not feel it her duty to go.

"'Tis this is the way with me," she said at last. "I don't want to be married at all, and faith, if I did, it wouldn't be to Jamesy Ryan. An' ye can tell her that if ye like. There's no call for her to be batin' Jamesy

Ryan down at a bargain, 'cos there's one side o' the bargain that don't count—an' that's the way wid me."

She said this assertively, defiantly, but the tears of her despair were very near her eyes.

John rose in a state of bewilderment to his feet. He had never contemplated these objections and, when he met them, the simplicity of his nature made it impossible for him to cope with them.

Knocking the burnt-out ashes from his pipe, he turned away to the bedroom door which was opposite the fire-place. What Bridget would say, he could only vaguely imagine. Whatever it was, he knew it would be fiery and incensed.

Nanno did not move from her seat in the chimney corner. She watched him go into the bedroom. She watched him shut the door, then her eyes turned again to the fire. Beside all her fears of the inevitable scene with Bridget, there rose the remembrance of what had been happening over the last few hours.

By that time Jerningham was probably on his way to Dublin. She saw him plainly in her mind. And then she began to wonder why he had asked her to drive into Anesk with him.

The fire became more dim, more lifeless; the shadows began to creep round her, as it slowly died out. Sleep was just commencing to dull her senses, when she heard a sudden exclamation from Bridget's room.

Immediately she sat up and listened. They were talking inside. Bridget's voice was rising with every word.

"The divil trust her!" she heard her mother exclaim; then the door of the room flew open, crashing against the kitchen dresser and shaking all the willow pattern plates and the old brass candlesticks, like a storm that had sprung up in the night.

CHAPTER XII.

"Holy mother o' God! So that's the way ye think ye can trate honest, dacint people! Begorra, those children that are not right from big'ning, 'tis mighty hard to manage 'em!"

Bridget closed the door behind her and strode, trembling with anger, into the middle of the room. She had risen from the bed, just as she was, arrayed only in her pink flannel nightgown. It was scarcely a becoming garment; it had not even the attraction of being clean. But she did not mind that. It never entered her head to consider it. Her hair fell loosely in greasy, clotted masses over her shoulders. She looked like a fury consumed with diabolical rage. The button at the neck of her nightgown was missing, and the white skin of her breast struck incongruous contrast with the flushed and coarser color of her face. Her feet were bare. She had not even put on a pair of shoes to cover their uncleanliness. Nanno shuddered as she looked at her.

"What the hell d'ye mane by sayin' ye won't be afther marryin' Jamesy Ryan?"

"I mane that I won't, an' that's simple enough."

Bridget folded her arms. It was her characteristic attitude when she adopted combat. In just such a pose, Nanno had seen her talking to Jamesy Ryan that afternoon.

"Where have ye been this evenin'?"

Nanno made no reply.

"Where have ye been?—answer me!"

"What's that matter to ye? Maybe I've been where I didn't hear women makin' shame o' themselves as ye're doin'."

This was almost the last struggle of Nanno's courage of despair; but it stung her mother to the quick. Behind the words, she felt that sense of superiority in her child, which brought the worst out of her.

With glittering eyes, she approached Nanno with a cat-like motion, bending down, like a witch in the moment of incantation, so that the coarse outlines of her body, the heavy hips and disproportionate limbs, showed revoltingly through the opening of the flannel shift.

"Yirra, d'ye think I don't know damn well where ye've been? The deuce o' fear I do."

The words came from between her lips in a hoarse whisper of rage. Nanno gazed at her for a moment, then turned away her head in disgust and fear.

"Ye've been wid that Mr. Jerningham from Fennel's over?"

She put the question with cunning assertiveness, but it was only a guess based upon instinct. The remembrance of her own folly and the fact that she had been told of Nanno's standing at the gate with him on the night of the Pattern, prompted her.

Nanno hung her head. It was not from shame or confusion; but directly Bridget saw the action, she construed it to be one or the other and knew that her surmise was correct. This only made her temper the more vile, the more bitter. It lashed her into a froth of fury. She possessed a fair judgment of human nature in her way; but there was always one grievous error that made most of her calculations false. She based every supposition upon her

own standpoint, which, while it might be vitally true of herself, was a dangerous and inaccurate way of judging others.

As soon as Nanno by her silence admitted that she had been with Jerningham, Bridget rushed to her conclusion.

With hands that were hot and wet, she seized Nanno's wrist and shook her violently.

"Ye blasted little ——!" she hissed, with rage over which her control was utterly lost.

Nanno dragged herself vehemently away, and a cry of horror and shame that was subdued with its intensity came from between her lips. She shrank into the chimney-corner.

"Faith, I guessed as much," she went on, "when himself told me ye wouldn't marry Jamesy Ryan. God blast ye! I wouldn't doubt ye! Didn't I tell ye it was only thrying to make a fool o' ye he was! Didn't I know well what he'd be afther in ye—the filthy, durrty baste, deuce take him! Glory be to God! He was fine and full o' promises I suppose; an' he was so pressin'—he was, av course. Shure, that's the way wid those." She minced her words in biting sarcasm.

And Nanno was dumb. She could only gaze at her mother in horrified amazement. There seemed to be no words that she could find to reply. And the longer she maintained her silence, the more Bridget believed herself to be right. With unconscious irony she related the whole of her fraility with the English artist, and applied it to the case with which she dealt. There was no hesitation in her abuse of Nanno, though it all redounded upon herself; and, seeing that Nanno still kept silent, she went on, taking a keen and cruel delight in painting the whole picture in vivid and awful colors before the girl's frightened eyes.

"Faith, there's a drop o' bad blood in ye, an', begorra,

I know where it comes from. God bless us! An' to think that ye, wid all yeer quiet ways, 'ud go an' let that durrty foreigner play his filthy game wid ye, a dacint honest girrl. Yirra, that settles it now! Ye'll be havin' to marry Jamesy Ryan, whether ye like ut or not, to save yeerself. Ye will so. Ye come of a kind that breeds easily—did ye know that? Begorra, 'twas a pity ye didn't think of it in time."

"It's a lie!"

The words rushed out of Nanno's lips with a violence that had been growing gradually in force and vehemence during her prolonged silence. In all that Bridget had said, she had been slowly realizing the fineness of Jerningham's character. If men were like that; if in every man lay the uncontrollable bestial desire for a woman, then Jamesy Ryan was surely one of them; but Jerningham was not. And when at last she did speak, the words were prompted more in defence of him than of herself.

"It's all a horrible lie!" she repeated.

At first Bridget would not believe her. She tossed back her head and laughed, so that her body shook.

"D'ye think I'm goin' to believe that?" she asked.

"Shure, I don't care whether ye believe it or don't," said Nanno bitterly; "'tis the truth, however. 'Twas only the way yeer own mind thought of it."

For a moment or two Bridget was perplexed. She could not realize that, after all, she had been in the wrong.

"Wisha, God help us then!" she exclaimed. "Why in hell's name won't ye marry Jamesy Ryan?"

"There's no call for me to be marryin' a man I don't like. 'Tis a shame for ye to be makin' me."

"Makin' ye? An' isn't it yeer duty to yeer father?"

"'Tis not me duty to any one to be marryin' a man that drinks as Jamesy Ryan does. I wouldn't trust him."

"Yirra, ye're gettin' mighty particular. Where's a man

in Rathmore that doesn't dhrink? Shure, if one o' thim found a shillin' under a shtone, dey'd go an' drink it. Goin' bi that, ye'd never be married at all."

"An' maybe that would suit me best afther all."

Bridget looked at her incredulously. The fierce rage that was seething within her had so far been kept in check by her astonishment. That Nanno should hold out against marrying, when the opportunity came in her way, was more than Bridget could understand. She seemed to overlook the fact that Nanno did not know the circumstances of her birth, and only judged her as ungrateful, because she refused to relieve John Troy of a responsibility which in good nature alone, he had taken upon his shoulders. But slowly and by sure degrees her surprise was giving way to the anger that lay beneath. Her eyes were full of a glistening fire, and her lips twitched dangerously as the words began to form themselves. She did not consider the light in which she would place herself. The keen desire to shame this girl, who, in every respect, was so superior to herself, was overmastering everything. It was not a desire born of the moment. She had long possessed it. John Troy had stopped her in the satisfaction of it before; nothing on earth would stop her now. The moment that she had longed for, the moment when Nanno had rebelled, had come at last. She was about to have her revenge upon everything: on Nanno herself for her aloofness, on her lover for his perfidy, and on her husband for his befriending of her illegitimate child. And she rose to it as an angry animal rises to a tormenting prey.

"Ye'll have to marry him," she said, with dangerous calm.

Nanno noticed the change in her manner.

"'Tis for meself to say that," she replied quietly.

Bridget gnashed her teeth.

"Be careful!" she exclaimed—"be careful! Ye're drivin' me desperate, that's what ye are. D'ye know that ye could be turned out o' this house as ye shtand widout a stitch o' clothin' to yeer back and divvle a one could be called up to own ye?"

Nanno looked at her with a white face.

"Begorra, ye can look; but that's the truth for ye, an' the truth's always bittherr. D'ye know what ye are——?" She bent down again closely to the girl. Nanno shrank from her because of the evil look in her eye.

"D'ye know what ye are?" she repeated, in her frightening whisper. "Ye're a bastard—that's what ye are. D'ye think ye're that man's choild?" Her arm pointed tragically to the bedroom. "Yirra, there's not a tint o' his blood in the whole o' ye."

Nanno covered her face with her hands.

"Glory be to God, shure when ye were born, if I'd put ye in his arms he'd a dropped ye like a hat spood—he would so. An' ye'd have the brazen face to say ye wouldn't marry any man he'd have a moind to say for ye. Begorra, 'tis the way ye should be goin' down on yeer knees to him and thankin' all the blissid saints that ye've had a home to live in as long as this." The saliva, in her rage, gathered white at the corners of her mouth.

"Not his child!" Nanno repeated dully. "Not his child!"

Bridget laughed harshly. To Nanno, it sounded like the laughter one would hear in hell.

"Yeer father was of the kind of Mr. Jerningham. Faith, he wanted all he could get out o' me, an' he got ut. Oh, glory be to God, an' he was full o' promises. He was so. Divvle blast him! I niver seen him since the night he played hell wid me; an' some years back I heard

say he was dead. 'Tis a quare place ye'll find him now if ye want to look for him."

For one moment Nanno took her hands from her face and gazed at her mother in horror; then, rising and crossing the room, she threw herself on the table by the window in a flood of tears.

"Ah, ye can cry; but that won't make ye yeer father's choild—by God, it will not. We always bred easy, we Powers, and, by dad, there was no stoppin' ye comin' into the world. Faith, ye'll marry Jamesy Ryan now. An' if he does take a drop now and agin, shure, that's a little beside the truth about ye if he knew it."

After this Bridget could say no more. Nanno was beaten. There was no defiance, no courage left in her, and as soon as her mother saw that, she felt her anger satisfied. With a last look at the prostrate figure on the table, she went back into the bedroom.

For almost an hour Nanno never moved. She lay like a log that the flood has washed on to the bank. Occasionally her shoulders shook convulsively; but beyond that she scarcely showed any sign of life. And then at last, when the flow of her tears was exhausted, she rose with heavy eyes and looked unseeingly about her.

"O God," she whispered, trying to begin a prayer. "O God," she said again—but there seemed nothing to pray for.

All that she had feared in life—all that had lain subconsciously in the back of her mind, seemed, in that one word of her mother's, to have suddenly been realized. Shame was her portion—her birthright—her inheritance.

CHAPTER XIII.

From that night and onwards, the fate which had molded Nanno's lips and left its shadows in her eyes began to make its way into her soul. For some weeks afterwards, she felt ashamed to be seen by any one and would not consent to go into the village under any pretext whatsoever. Whenever she met John Troy, her eyes would fall from his gaze. For a time she could look no one in the face. It was as though she had been branded with some cruel mark that stamped her as unclean, unfit for those around her. If Johnny slipped his hand into hers, she would draw it gently away. Whenever Bridget touched her, she shivered. And at night, while the sound of her brothers' sleeping kept rhythm with the monotony of her thoughts, she would lie awake, consumed with an unreasonable disgust for herself that was piteously degrading. She felt unclean, even to herself. No amount of reasoning seemed powerful enough to change the attitude of her mind. She knew it was through no fault of her own; she knew that by no sense of right could any blame attach itself to her; yet the stain of it seemed so personally her own, to be so much more vitally connected with herself than any one else, that she could not wash it out of her mind.

Whenever John Troy gave her any command about the farm, she obeyed it with hurried servility, as though she were a slave. Whenever Bridget requested her to do anything, she did it immediately, without comment. For those few weeks, until the keenest edge of her disgrace had

been indifferently blunted by the stone of time, she felt that her duty, her obedience, her existence, belonged to any but herself.

And on the matter of Jamesy Ryan, she decided that very night. Three days later, when she found an opportunity of speaking to John alone, she told him briefly of her decision. He listened with astonishment to the alteration of her mind and the meekness of her voice.

"What did herself say to ye, that night?" he asked, when she had finished. He was not so simple as to be deceived by the unexpected upheaval of her determination. A twenty years' acquaintance with Bridget had not deadened his perception of the methods which she used, and he knew that, with Nanno in particular, she was pitiless and without heart.

On the night in question, he had heard nothing of what had passed between Nanno and her mother. Discarding his clothes, that depended from him by the simplest contrivances in the world, he had slipped into bed in a few moments and, no sooner had his head found its accustomed groove on the pillow, than he fell into a depth of sleep known only to those who live in God's air; and all the highest tones of Bridget's raucous voice could not have awakened him.

But, though he had heard nothing to arouse his suspicions, the humility of Nanno's words quickened his instincts at once.

"What did herself say to ye, that night?" he repeated.

Nanno looked away.

"She told me like that it was yeerself I should be considerin', an' shure, I suppose she's right. She is, of course."

John tried to catch her eye; but she evaded him.

"An' is that all?"

"It is."

Whether this were true or not, and John very much doubted her word, he knew by the sound of her voice that he could elicit nothing further, so he did not persist. But he questioned her closely, trying to disturb the fixity of her determination. This also was useless and, beginning at last to be deceived by the apparent earnestness of her manner, that she really wished to show her willingness to marry Jamesy Ryan, he let the matter drop.

After this, the solicitor in Anesk was called into the affair. They all drove into the town, Nanno included, and in his dingy little office, with uncarpeted floor and piles of discolored papers, with which the must and the dust lived in one accord, the last throes of the mutual agreement were entered into.

He was a small, fat little man, with kindly and knowing eyes that looked at everything without seeing and saw everything without looking. He sat behind an old mahogany desk that was always one mangled confusion of unanswered letters, and he never said an unkind word to any one in his life. In speaking, he had a slight impediment, a stammer that had a partiality for certain letters of the alphabet. But this did not interfere with his business; many times, in fact, the humor of it had won him a case before the resident magistrate. By nature, he was a sentimentalist to the core; but in business, he relied upon the length of his upper lip, the drollery of his impediment, and the humorous twinkle in his eye.

There are always three ways of winning a case, and they are made use of in every court, from the Rathmore Petty Sessions to the oak-paneled chambers in Fleet Street. Either you make the Bench laugh, or you make it weep, or you appeal to its sense of logic; and all these, if they are to be successful, may be done regardless, if neces-

sary, of the truth. Little Mr. Donegan always adopted the first. His type of countenance suited it. To utilize the second, one must have a watery eye and a mournful voice; while a lengthy face, clean-shaven, a voice that impresses every one, even its owner, and an unerring knowledge of when to bring the clenched fist down upon the table, are all that are required for the third.

Mr. Donegan was certainly a humorist; he seldom smiled. And it was mostly the comedy of life that came as grist to his mill.

As he sat and listened to the last efforts of Jamesy Ryan to increase the amount of the dowry and Bridget's valiant though illogical replies, his eyes twinkled merrily.

"Yirra, damn it all, me good 'ooman, make it two hundred and thirty-foive for luck an' the look of ut."

"The look of ut!" Bridget exclaimed. Her eyes piteously sought the ceiling, appealing silently but impressively to the God of all justice, then descended, full of scorn and contempt, on the face of her prospective son-in-law. "Glory be to God, shure, if ye don't like the looks o' two hundred and thurrty-wan pounds in meltin' gold, ye can leave it for others that'll take it quick enough. Yirra, man, ye're as mane as bogwater, an' I havin' to get the porther and whishkey for ye to be makin' yeerself drunk wid at the weddin'!"

This was the kind of thing that Mr. Donegan repeated with admirable mimicry to his friends. He was enjoying every word of it, when his eyes lighted on Nanno. She was seated on a chair in a far corner of the room, the expression of her face seeming to separate her from all that was going on, as the face of one in the beauty of prayer is distinct from the crowd.

"Is that your daughter that's going to be married?" he asked Bridget quietly.

"Begorra, it is, if this young man'll have the dacint honesty not to go back on the word he gave me the day we reaped the field o' barley."

Mr. Donegan looked at Nanno again, and the sentimentalist came almost to the surface. From that moment, until everything was arranged, he could not take his eyes away from her. There was many a word he wrote in the deed of settlement, which he was compelled to cross out and write again.

She said not a word through the whole proceeding. It would have seemed as though she were the very last person concerned. At one moment, before the deed was signed, when Jamesy Ryan, in sudden indecision, had declared again that he must have his two hundred and thirty-five pounds, Mr. Donegan thought he saw the expression of absolute fatality replaced for one brief moment by a look of almost hope; but it died away again, when Jamesy was brought once more to Bridget's way of thinking.

And then, when the whole matter, to which John had all the time been a silent spectator, was settled, they went out into the street, repairing at once to the nearest public-house and leaving Nanno to look about as she chose.

An unconscious impulse led her to the shop window where she had descended from the car on which Jerningham had brought her from Rathmore. For some length of time, she stood there, looking at the articles that were for sale, yet not realizing the existence of any one of them.

All that she had feared that night, and worse than that, had come to pass since then. Up to that moment, it seemed as though she had lived; there had been pleasures and delights in existence that she had looked forward to. Now, she looked forward to nothing; in fact, everything that lay before her filled her with a loathsome foreboding and dread.

From that day on which the settlements were signed, until the next Shrove-tide, there was nothing to be done but wait. To Nanno, the time wore various aspects. Sometimes it seemed as though the years would pass quicker than those few months. At others, more especially when, in view of their approaching relationship, Jamesy would come up to the farm and, in the moments of showing his admiration, endeavor to taste the fruits that he was soon to wrench from her with his rough hands, she would imagine it to be but a breath before the awful day would arrive.

Meeting her one day in the street, Father Mehan stopped and smiled.

"Faith, 'tis aisy to see what suits ye better than the convent," he said, with native flattery.

Nanno did not reply and, mistaking her silence for maiden modesty, he had added:

"Well, I suppose I'll see ye next Shrove-tide, Nanno," and, believing that she was perfectly contented with circumstances, he had gone on his way.

How she had the courage to bear and face it all is beyond the understanding of a man to say. Women are not only stoics to the agonies of the body; it is not only the labor of child-birth that they are able to bear with tightened lips and silent tongues; they are stoics also to the agonies of the mind. Yet all that Nanno suffered for those few months; all that she hoped for and, as time went on, despaired of, until life became in actual fact the terrible reality she had sometimes dreamed it to be, is but the outset of the tragedy that is hereafter to be played.

She was young—intensely young—and there lay the greater pity of it. It is hard to realize that life is to be suffered, quite as much as, if not more so, than it is to be lived. It may not, it is true, be such a serious matter after all, and the temperaments that find it so are

greatly blessed. But when one's birth is the satire of fatality as was Nanno's; when one feels the hideous necessity of living it through because of two immense uncertainties it is the lesser; then life can be all that Nanno feared of it, and may contain all that she found it to hold. What recompenses there may be hereafter no philosophy of clerics or wisdom of wise men can say. Heaven is a gentle word with which to lull children to sleep, and hell a fearsome one to terrify them to obedience. But two things only are constant; two things only resist the logic and the reasoning of us all—we live and we die—beyond that there is a veil which hides the wonders and the mysteries from the farthest-seeing eye or the deepest philosophy. And into this state, this condition of things, we are brought without will, question, or consent! Because one night a man and a woman who had been nothing to each other in the eyes of the Church had, in one moment, for the pressing pleasure of it, gratified a sensual desire, Nanno had been called into existence, a prey for the sport of Fate, a frail vessel to battle with the buffetings of the storm as best she could. Two courses alone were left open for her to adopt; either she could choose the uncertainty of life, and cling to its existence, or, leaving it, she might face the uncertainty of death and the ban of the Church. Had she not accepted the former, preferring the uncertainty of death to that of life, this story had never been written, and the Gods would have been cheated of their game.

BOOK II.

HOLY MATRIMONY.

CHAPTER I.

On Shrove Tuesday, in the following year, Nanno was married to Jamesy Ryan.

The little church of Rathmore with its simple interior, its square, brick-tiled floor, and its varnished rafters, was filled with the villagers and those friends and relations who had come from various parts to witness the ceremony and partake of the hospitality that would follow after.

Compared with a burial, a wedding in Ireland is as a rushlight to a bonfine. As an occasion for the distribution of much alcohol, it is welcomed enthusiastically, but the ceremony itself is in no way so impressive. Death and emigration are the two great incidents of life in Ireland. Marriage is a small matter compared with these.

There is, perhaps, no country in the world where a sympathy with human nature is more wanting, more extinct. Their loves and their hates, fierce though they sometimes may be, are based upon motives that are as different from those of other nations as the Frenchman differs from the Sphinx. To an Irishman, his land is his mother, his wife and his child, all three in one; his women-folk are little more than beasts of burden—cattle upon the land that he loves. Insult his land, and he will wait forever for the day to wreak his vengeance—insult his women-folk, and a few stiff glasses of whisky will make amends for a great deal.

Ireland is notorious for its pretty women. That may be so; but it will be found that they are nearly all of

them unmarried. Once a woman marries in Ireland, she deteriorates; she becomes a hewer of wood and a drawer of water, and withers into premature old age. The number of children born to an average Irishwoman is proof of it all. No man who had sympathy with human nature or a love of his wife, would tax her strength and multiply her labors as the Irish workman will do. She is only the beast to bear his burden, the cattle on the land that he loves. Every record of English injustice in that country—and there are thousands that are only too true—are all those inflicted on the land. This man stole a farmer's homestead, that man killed another for his domain—but scarce a tale of the seduction of this man's wife or the rape of that man's child; and, when the soldiers were spread throughout the country, that must have been a common story too. Yet never is it repeated now. It has slipped the memory of them all, while the stories of the land—the land—the land—these will remain forever.

Of all those who were present at the marriage of Nanno Troy to Jamesy Ryan in the little church of Rathmore, there was probably not one to whom the matter appealed in its serious aspect; not one, excepting Nanno herself. There was merriment; there were jests. Ripples of suppressed laughter ran along the occupants of the long forms. Jamesy Ryan, while they were waiting for Father Mehan's arrival, turned frequently and winked lasciviously at those of his friends who were present. Bridget, herself, was in the best of spirits. In muffled whispers, interrupted at times by coarse though subdued hilarity, she gossiped with those who were sitting near, and John Troy, still believing that it was Nanno's willing desire, discussed the coming summer with his neighbors.

To Nanno alone, it was real, horrible, grotesque. For the most part it seemed to be a dream, a dream, neverthe-

less, that she knew to be true. She moved as though she were asleep. There was no trace of emotion in her face; her eyes looked away into a distance that no one but herself could see. When those girls of the village with whom, from time to time, she had been more or less friendly, spoke to her about the good fortune that was hers, she answered without feeling or expression. All that they said, she quietly agreed with; when they laughed, she laughed with them, but it was only the echo of theirs, the laughter that the walls of a vault will throw back to him who utters it.

And then, Father Mehan arrived. The laughter and the jesting died down into a quiet hush; the service began.

Nanno tried to feel that the words which were being said, applied to herself But even standing there with Jamesy Ryan beside her, it seemed hard to realize. With her whole nature and desire so foreign to it all, it was difficult to believe that it was absolutely true.

Almost before she was aware of it, it was over; her condition in life was changed. No longer free to speculate upon her own future, no longer able to count herself her own, she belonged to some one else. Her future was there already; it both faced her and was at her side.

In the vestry, she had to submit to the inevitable kiss of bondage, while the others stood by and laughed.

"Begorra, that's the first of a lot of 'em," she heard a girl whisper.

She even framed her lips into the form of a kiss, when he put his mouth to hers. But no kiss was given. The sound of his own obliterated that fact, even to himself. And then, when the registry was signed; her name in neat, legible writing that she had learned at the National School, his, with a cross against the name that Father Mehan had written for him, they hurried out of the church and

mounted the cars and the traps that had been waiting for them.

The crowd cheered and shouted as, with a lashing of whips, a clattering of hoofs and a jolting of springs, they drove helter-skelter away. In that part of the world one drives slowly and the longest way round to a funeral. It is the importance that falls on death. At a wedding, one drives hell for leather; and, if it were possible, the shortest route as the crow flies would be the one preferred.

In ten minutes they were all back at the farm. The wedding had taken place at four o'clock in the afternoon, so that the evening was already gray by the time that they returned. And then began the feasting of the night.

One of the outhouses had been cleared of all its contents and there, to the tunes of a blind fiddler, there was dancing in all its national forms. The kitchen was filled, as it had been on the day of the Pattern, with men and women drinking the whole night long. The incessant sounds of their talking and the muddled laughter of their voices would sometimes be broken by the metallic breaking of glass, as a tumbler was dropped from an unsteady hand. But to Nanno, the quiet, peaceful farmhouse seemed like hell; a pandemonium that would never regain its peacefulness until the end of time. She was dragged from one place to another by her friends, to share in whatever amusement was going on. She was made to dance with the rest of them, and still it was all a dream; a dream from which she would not wake until everything was quiet, and all the voices had ceased. And every now and again, the face of Jamesy Ryan came to her as a reality. His voice would rise above the others, and she would look quickly at him as though she had been reminded; he would put his arm round her waist in the dance, and a light of conscious horror would creep into her eyes.

So the night wore on, drawing nearer every moment to the hour when she would be left alone with him. In a desire of fear, endeavoring to put off the evil moment as long as she dared, she began, in the first, small hours of the morning, to enter into the spirit of the dancing. When one set was finished, she urged another, to begin. If a girl had to leave, she would fill in her place herself, and dance, as though new energy had suddenly entered into her and she wished to infuse it into the minds of others.

But it was all unnatural, forced, an effort of despair. The light of enthusiasm went out of her eyes, as a candle is snuffed by the extinguisher, when she saw Jamesy Ryan lurching across the floor of the outhouse, a purpose fixed in his face. With an unsteady gaze, he was looking at her, and she knew that the moment had come.

One more effort she made, calling to the fiddler to play quicker, and whirling round with her partner in the square; the next moment Ryan's hand was laid on her shoulder.

"Glory be to God," he said thickly, "ye're dancing the deuce out o' yeerself," and, taking her by the arm, he dragged her away.

The girls looked at her, and grinned; the men burst forth into laughter as she followed him out of the outhouse. That laughter rang in her ears until the light of the morning found its way into the sky.

"God blast 'em," he said, when they were alone outside in the yard—"Shure, 't'll be marnin' before they'll be thinkin' o' goin'."

He stumbled heavily, and she caught at his arm involuntarily to save him. The jolting of it brought on a feeling of sickness, and, for a moment, he stood there, swaying uncertainly. Then it overcame him. He vomited. Nanno shuddered, and shut her eyes. But she

stood by him until it had passed; praying that no one would come out and see him.

Soon after she had left the dance, the party broke up, and one by one they went home. As the last of them drove away, Nanno turned back into the kitchen. Her energies were dead; she felt exhausted. And then she seated herself on the three-legged stool until Jamesy came back from the yard outside to claim her—the claiming of the animal that the butcher has bought for the shambles.

The moment as she passed through the door of the room that had been prepared for them, seemed as though it were the last that she could endure; yet, above it all, governing and controlling every action, rose the remembrance that she was a shame-child—one who could have no right for sympathy or reason for regret. This was her duty; this was her penalty; the sins of the father were falling heavily, but with divine accuracy, upon the child. And, as the door closed behind her, leaving her alone with the man whom she had discarded from the beginning, she fell down across the bed; but her eyes were dry, and her heart—stone.

CHAPTER II.

Glenlicky is a wild part of the country. A little river, bearing the name of the district, flows through the low-lying valley of gray, lichened rock and warm, purple heather. The water of it, is of a soft, brown color, caused by the peat land through which it has passed. During a flood it rushes along over the shallow bed, resting now and again in the deep pools where the trout lie lazily, then seething on past the gray-green rocks through the lonely valley. Here and there, across the big stretch of country, a farmhouse rises behind a clump of trees; but they are few and far between. The nearest place of habitation to Jamesy Ryan's farm, was Kiley's Cross, which was composed of a police barracks, a public house, and two or three cottages. They all stand on the square where four cross-roads meet. From this circumstance and the owner of the public house, the place gets its name. To the ignorant traveler, Kiley's Cross is merely a half-way house, dropped into the midst of a lonely part of country. And two miles distant from it stands Jamesy Ryan's farm.

Surrounded by a few stunted poplars, with its warm, thatched roof and standing high up on the side of the valley, it appears at the first glance to be homely, comfortable, secure. But in winter, when the nights are long; when the wind rattles through the leafless branches of the trees and the mud floor of the kitchen is damp with the rain that has filtered through the thatch; there are few places in those parts that are more desolate. To Nanno,

after the comparative comfort of John Troy's farm, it became at times intolerable. At night she would pray for the daylight, and when it came, gray, misty, blowing over the land in great sheets of floating rain, she would long for the night to come to shut it out and hide it from her.

Rathmore was a small village, no doubt; but it brought with it a sense of peaceful security. There was always something consoling in the small, bright lights that burned in the cottage windows. Even at eight and nine o'clock at night people were moving about. Men talked in groups at the corners of the street. But here, if she looked out of the one small, dirty window in the kitchen, there was not a light to be seen. Only the gaunt, gray forms of the stunted poplars stood out, webbed, against the leaden color of the sky and across the country the land was bleak and cold.

The cottage itself was poor and miserable. The rafters were rotting and the thatch was always damp. The fifteen acres that Jamesy possessed were badly farmed; for though John Troy had said he was hard-working, yet Nanno's estimation of him had been the more correct. A man who is sober only on occasions cannot put hard work into anything.

Almost every day, from the time they were married until spring had begun to set in and there really was work to be done, Nanno would be left to herself. Jamesy would go up to Kiley's Cross, spending the whole day there, and returning home sometimes late at night, his clothes often caked with mud where he had fallen. The ground through that valley and up the sides of the hills was none too even for a man to walk in the possession of all his wits. On these occasions, expecting sometimes that she would turn and abuse him for his neglect, he frequently lost his temper at the quietness of her submission.

"Yirra, damn and blast ye," he said once, as he took a seat threateningly beside her. "Why the hell can't ye have a little more spirrut in ye?"

She made no answer and then, in uncontrollable irritation, he struck her with his open hand, throwing her from the stool on which she was sitting to the ground. She fell heavily, but was not hurt in any way, and as she rose to her feet, her deep, gray eyes looked steadily at him.

"I'm yeer wife," she said, regaining her breath; "I belong to ye—but if ye treat me in that way, 'tis a short time ye'll find me submittin' to it."

He tried to laugh nonchalantly. The effort made him look supremely ridiculous.

"Bi gob, I'll do as I damn well loike," he retorted; but for the next few days, though he showed her no affection and returned at nights just as drunk as ever, he kept his hands under control and did not ill-use her again.

The sensual attraction that had driven him previous to their marriage had not taken long to be satiated; and when the freshness of her in his mind had worn itself to a thread; when her cheeks had lost the warmth of their color and her eyes were heavy with sleepless nights, he resorted to Kiley's Cross, spending day by day there the sum of money that had come to him with her dowry.

It was just the hell on earth that Nanno had expected it to be, and only by keeping her mind aloof from it all could she retain that self-respect which, no matter how she had been shamed, was still inseparable from her nature. She never went up to Kiley's Cross herself, though, for the first week or so of their married life, he had tried to persuade her to do so. But she was not of the type who endeavor to drown their sorrow. There was something so ignoble in it to her mind that, though night after night she would see Jamesy throw himself on to his bed and

drift off immediately into a sodden condition of sleep that became oblivious of everything—which, as she watched him, seemed a state of mind that she almost envied—yet the thought of the means by which he had arrived at it disgusted her to nausea.

And thus, day by day, night by night, the period of her married life lengthened. The circumstances of it became worse and worse as time went on, but she also became more inured to bear it. She realized how much more hardened to her conditions she was when, one day, a neighbor came in from a distant farm and, gossipping with her over a cup of tea, had told her tales about Jamesy's doings at Kiley's Cross that she had not thought about before.

The good woman felt sympathetic to Nanno's hardships, which were a byword in the district, and she thought a little consolation might help her.

"Maybe there's not a tint o' truth in it," she said carefully, mistaking Nanno's silent acceptance of the story for a cloak behind which deeper feelings lay. "'Tis that widdey woman, Mrs. Doran. Wisha, 'twas a bad day that brought her to these parts. She niver wrote the scroll of a pen to her husband for the last six months before he was drowned at sea. Shure, 'tis the way there's a bad drop in her."

It was from this incident, perhaps, more than any other, that Nanno realized how utterly indifferent to life she had become. But it was slowly killing her. Her life, young as it was, seemed utterly, irretrievably wasted. She had not realized before she was married all the joys that life could contain; but since, when she had experienced some of its greatest horrors, it was as though she had come to know by contrast. She had failed to make of life what she knew could be made of it, when circumstance or a great and masterful nature control it for its good. But a masterful

nature was not hers. She could not stride barefooted over the sharp flints of adversity; she was not strong enough to hew her way through the tangled forest of depression where the daylight only steals through odd chinks in the leaves. Hers was not the personality which seizes the ax, fells the tree and makes a rent of daylight in the gloom, where the sun had failed to force its way. Nanno, rather, was the child of the story-book. Circumstances might harden her, conditions might embitter her; yet always at the root of her nature would be that childish love of being intensely happy in the sunlight of life and looking to one stronger than herself when the clouds were heavy or the night was dark.

But it was all dark in those first few months of her married life, and the only strength she had on which to rely was her religion. No love had entered her life up till then, and so she leaned upon her faith, still hoping against hope, still praying against belief.

Often, at night, Jamesy would return to find her by the kitchen fire upon her knees, the deep orange of the firelight glowing on her face, her lips parted silently. At those times, she would rise hastily to her feet and busy herself about the room as though nothing had happened.

It was under a circumstance like this, that Jamesy had one night returned, accompanied by friends with whom he had attended the wake of an old farmer who had died in the district. To have been at a wake implies, almost of necessity, the state of intoxication. They were all of them more or less drunk.

The soft mud of the farmyard outside had muffled the sound of their footsteps and, when the door suddenly flew open, they saw Nanno kneeling by the chimney corner. She had evidently been in that attitude for some time, for her hand rested on the three-legged stool by her side, sup-

porting her body. Immediately she rose to her feet; but not before two of them had noticed her.

One burst out into laughter, and the other—it was Jamesy himself—spat into the room.

"Glory be to God!" he exclaimed, "shure, we've had prayers enough for to-night, anyhow. Ould Brodie's soul ought to be restin' like a babe now, wid all we've said for him."

They crowded into the room, the one woman who was with them scrutinizing Nanno directly she entered. For a moment, Nanno was overcome with her surprise and then, realizing, from the description she had received, that this was the notorious Mrs. Doran whose intimacy with Jamesy had already been related to her, she withdrew her gaze in disgust.

"Good evenin', ma'am," Mrs. Doran said brazenly. Nanno affected not to hear, and the widow winked at Jamesy.

She was a hard-featured woman, who still possessed in her face the attributes of good looks. But there was something particularly vicious in the regularity of her features and the coarse color of her skin; there was, moreover, a sense of shamelessness in her expression. Her skirt of rough homespun was cut short above her ankles. There was some of the brutality of the man about her, and she walked with heavy steps that betokened the daring independence of her nature.

"'Tis a fine evenin' ma'am," she went on, determining to make Nanno notice her.

Nanno looked round.

"Maybe," she replied—"I've not been out."

"'Twas a fine wake ye're after missin'," she persisted.

Nanno nodded her head, and passed from the kitchen into the bedroom, closing the door behind her.

They all turned their heads, watching her departure; then, one by one, with a smile lurking in the corner of their eyes, they looked back at Jamesy.

"Shure, she's moighty supayrior," said the widow, gazing up at the ceiling.

The three men laughed, but Jamesy stared viciously at the door that Nanno had closed behind her.

"Begorra, she's drivin' me to hell wid her supayriority," he said under his breath, though loud enough for them all to hear it.

"Me darlin' bhoy," sighed Mrs. Doran.

That was a type of humor that made them shout with laughter and, seeing that it amused them, she gave them more of it.

"Yirra, come and sit on me knee, me poor fella," she murmured. There was a maudlin caress in her voice.

The other men pushed him on to her and, when he put his arms round her neck to save himself, they shouted their hilarity again.

"Is it drivin' ye to hell she is?" she began again, when she had recovered herself from the shock of his impact. She patted him on his unshaven face with her coarse hands as she said it.

Jamesy looked at her and she winked. The other men urged them on with their laughter.

"Begorra, she'd make a foine mother, she would so," said one of them.

"Maybe I'd make better than ye'd think, if I got the chanst," she replied readily and, unseen to them, she accompanied the words with a sudden grip of Jamesy's waist as she held him to her.

Ryan moved uneasily, and the others rolled around the room in their merriment.

And so this scene of loathsome debauchery continued.

A bottle of whisky was produced, and the drinking of it but intensified the coarseness of their jests.

Lying awake in the other room, Nanno listened dully to all that was going on. She heard their shouts of laughter, every blast of it fraying her nerves, laying bare the threads; until, at last, covering her head with the bed-clothes, she strove to shut it out of her ears.

At last, by whispered persuasions, addressed to Jamesy when the others were not looking, Mrs. Doran induced him to get rid of the other men. They accepted eventually the blatant hints that were offered them and, with sly looks at each other, they moved unsteadily towards the door.

Mrs. Doran yawned and rose slowly to her feet.

"Faith, I'd better be goin' meself," she said. Jamesy looked at her apprehensively, but she made no movement to carry out what she said.

"Shure, 'tis aiqual to the deuce what time we get home," said the last man, as he lurched out of the door into the darkness.

"If ye ever get home at all," Mrs. Doran called out after him.

She seated herself again in the chimney corner as Jamsey closed the door and, while in the pretense of gazing at the fire, she watched him as he came back slowly into the room. She saw him stand midway between her and the door. She saw him listening. Everything was silent; and then, as he crept to the door of the bedroom, bending down in an attitude of concentrated attention, a vicious smile turned the corners of her mouth. She was on the eve of triumph over the woman whom she had hated by instinct and now loathed on acquaintance.

"Begorra, she'd sleep through hell," she said in an

undertone. Jamesy nodded his head, and crossed the room stealthily to her side.

But Nanno was not asleep. She had heard the departure of the three men and, with the bed-clothes removed from her face, her eyes and ears were strained in the darkness. The walls of the cottage were thick, but, nevertheless, she had heard their laughing and talking plainly enough. Now, not a sound could be heard in the other room.

For some time she listened and waited, and at last, hearing nothing, thinking that Jamesy must have gone out with them as well, she stole out of bed. In another moment she had opened the door that led into the kitchen.

A scuffle and a word of cursing reached her ears before she saw anything. Apprehensively, she took one more step forward; then, with a catching of her breath, she turned her back, hurrying again into the bedroom and closing the door hastily behind her.

For a few moments, everything was silent again. With heart pounding against her as she lay in the bed, she waited for something else to happen. It came at last. Jamesy's footsteps sounded heavily as he crossed the kitchen floor; the door flew open, letting the dim light from outside pour in a murky stream into the room. Then he stood beside the bed. Once she looked at him. She could look no more. There was hate and murder in his eyes. Instinctively she felt that she was facing the blade of danger and, with a little cry, she covered the clothes about her.

He uttered a violent curse, and tore them from her shoulders. She lay there with her arms across her eyes, her head buried in the pillow. But it availed her nothing. He was not in the mood to stop and think; the fury of a guilty mind had gripped him. With iron fingers, he

caught her wrists and dragged her arms apart. Then his clenched fist fell with a dull, unyielding thud upon her upturned face. The mark it left was white as death. She moaned.

"By God, ye'll niver be afther spyin' on me agen!" he muttered, and then his blows fell on her as the hammers that drive in a wedge. When she tried to get away from him, he seized the loosened strands of her hair and dragged her to his reach. A thin stream of blood flowed from her mouth; blood that, in that dim, uncertain light, looked black and ugly. This was the shambles to which, passing before the altar of God and with the blessing of the priest in their ears, he had led her. But she still moaned, and so long as she did that, fear did not stop him. He beat her about the body, caring little that her child was yet unborn; and then, when her moaning ceased, when he realized that he was beating a still and lifeless thing that gave no answer to its punishment, his arm swung limply to his side, and he looked at her disfigured face in stupid horror.

She never moaned; she never moved.

"Chroist!" he exclaimed.

Then he ran into the kitchen, the blood on his hands, the terror in his eyes.

The kitchen was empty. Mrs. Doran had gone.

CHAPTER III.

For almost two weeks Nanno never moved from the bed where she had been beaten. Every time she saw the blood-stain upon the clothes, she shuddered, and every time that Jamesy entered the room, she closed her eyes.

The doctor from Rathmore had come over that next day to see her and, during his visit, Jamesy found it necessary to be at work in one of the fields farthest from the house.

Dr. Fitzgerald was a young man, square about the shoulders, keen in the eyes. He had not long concluded his walking of the hospitals and life to him, as yet, was not a thing to be taken for granted. His manner at that time would have been detrimental to his career, had he been attending a better class of patients; but with the poor country people, the brusqueness of his voice and his abrupt way of speaking, could not have been more suitable. He gave them confidence; it was a reflection of the confidence he felt in himself.

As he stood by Nanno's bedside there was a keen, critical expression in his eyes: the keenness of the lancet which cuts to the root of the evil.

"How did this happen?" he asked.

Her lips twitched with pain. She was piteously weak.

"Come now—how did it happen?" he repeated.

"'Twas the way I fell on me face," she said under her breath, and her eyes watched his face closely for any expression of belief. How could she have told him the truth? It might be a common occurrence for a husband

to beat his wife. The doctor, no doubet, had seen plenty of instances of it. But it was not common to Nanno. Undeserved, brutal, and cowardly though it had been, she felt it to be a shame to herself. She could not tell him the truth; yet, realizing that he might not accept her statement, she watched his face critically to see if he believed.

But she saw nothing. She could not have said whether he credited her information or not. He merely bent over the bed and made a closer examination of her wounds, saying, nothing.

He ordered ointments to be used, lotions to be applied. In a rough sort of way, he took her hand and told her to cheer up.

"Good heavens—it might have been worse," he said.

He had seen worse.

Then he went out of the house and into the fields.

"Have you seen Ryan?" he asked of a man whom he found resting from work under a hedge.

"'Tis way in that field over."

He pointed with a knotted finger in the direction.

Fitzgerald climbed a hedge and disappeared out of sight. When Jamesy saw him approaching, he stood up from his work and a breath of cold wind blew over his forehead. He touched his hat.

"Your wife's in a bad way," said Fitzgerald.

"Bigob, she is that, sorr," he said, shifting his hands on the spade he held.

"Yes—and do you know what's the cause of it?"

Jamesy's face assumed an expression of consideration.

"'Twas the way she fell."

"Oh!—she told you that?"

"She did."

Fitzgerald clenched his fists. The pleasure of doing

the same to Ryan as he had done to his wife, was a temptation that he could barely resist.

"I'm a doctor," he said shortly.

"Begorra, I know that, sorr."

"Well, then, you can understand why, when a woman is battered about the face as your wife is, I know damned well what has been the cause of it. Your fist was the cause of it, you hulking coward, and by God, if you repeat it, I won't keep my hands off you. And when I've done with you, we'll see if the law has anything to say. D'you understand that?"

"I do, sorr."

Fitzgerald looked into his eyes, the lancet again cutting into the unhealthy flesh; then he turned on his heel, striding away too quickly to hear the curse that Ryan muttered after him.

On two other occasions before Nanno was able to rise from her bed, the doctor came to see her; but he never alluded to the knowledge that he possessed. During both visits, Jamsey managed to keep out of the way, and when Fitzgerald had gone, he would come and curse her because she had irritated him into the losing of his temper. About his unfaithfulness to her he said nothing. He was quite aware that she must know, and he hated her the more for the knowledge; yet, for a time, he abated his visits to Kiley's Cross, and Nanno saw no more of Mrs. Doran.

But this effort of neutrality—an avoidance of vice and an absence of virtue—did not last for long. At the threshing, Mrs. Doran made her reappearance with the other hands who had been requisitioned to help. As she stood by the machine, untying one sheaf after another, Jamesy would come and speak to her, their laughter and remarks often reaching Nanno's ears as she prepared the

meal for the workers in the kitchen. At the sound of it, she would stop in what she was doing; her eyes, wandering to the window, would look out across the country, flushed with the purple of its heather and brightened with patches of green or yellow fields of uncut corn. All feeling about Jamesy's unfaithfulness, all suffering was dead; even the sense of shame that it brought, was numbed, and smarted no longer. Yet, as she saw the brightness of the sun outside and felt that life in a world that could show such simple beauty must have its better and its more perfect view, a sigh of regret came involuntarily to her lips. There was such a thing as being happy; and she realized that happiness—in what form her imagination did not describe—might have been hers.

But so long as these conditions of her life remained the same, she knew it to be impossible to gain even a glimpse of any state of happiness, however slight, however transitory. Yet she would still, driven by the sense of duty and dominated by the fear of her religion, have continued to accept them as they were, had not Jamesy, on that first night of the threshing, fallen back into the ways of life which, for a time, since her illness, he had eschewed.

It was then that Nanno took a course of action upon herself. Without telling her husband of her decision, she set off the next morning for Grange, the nearest parish to Glenlickey, which, united to that of Rathmore, came under the care of Father Mehan. It was his day there for hearing confession; and to him, as pastor and mentor of all her doings, she determined to pour out her soul.

"Oh, indeed! Oh, indeed! Shure, there now—tch!—tch!—tch!" he repeated over and over again, as she told him all the story; its revolting details left undescribed, yet evident, impellingly obvious in the note of shuddering remonstrance that trembled in her voice.

"An' is that the way he's gone, then?" he said, when she had finished. "'Twas always the way. He was a bold fellow; but, glory be to God, I niver thought it was as bad as that with him. An' it's the way ye say that this woman's coming back to the house?"

"She is, father."

"Shure, I know who it is. There's no need for ye not to be tellin' me. I don't want to know, mind ye; shure I know already. I do, of course. There's only one woman in Glenlickey that would brazen it out like that. Faith, I had a mind meself that something was going wrong with ye—I had so. When the docthor told me the way ye'd been beaten a few weeks ago, I made up me mind to come and see ye."

"The doctor?" Nanno echoed.

"Shure; who else? Wasn't he attendin' ye?"

"But I told him it was the way I fell on me face."

"Shure, I know that; but the docthor's no fool. He knew ye couldn't fall on both sides of yeer face at once. Tch!—tch!—tch!—tch! An' what did ye think of doin' about it yeerself?"

Nanno hesitated. To her, what she was going to say, was a big step; and, for a moment, while she paused before the words that she would choose, it assumed proportions greater than she had ever seen while she had walked by herself into Grange.

"I'm goin' away," she said at last, with firm decision. "I'm goin' away. I couldn't live with him any longer."

There was a long pause of silence. Nanno listened with ears strained for the slightest sound he might make which would indicate the attitude of his mind towards what she had just said. She heard nothing. Only the sound of the chapel woman scraping the fallen grease from the large candle-stand reached her ears.

At last he answered her.

"Is it by putting one sin on the top of another that ye think ye're goin' to get at the right way o' doin' things?" he asked quietly.

"Sin?" she said. "What sin is there in me goin' away? Shure, I can't live with him. God never meant a mortal being to live such a life as I am."

"God means us to do a power o' things that seem to have no reason in them at all," he replied.

"But it's the way that it's bringin' more sin on him. He hates the sight o' me. 'Twould only be drivin' him to do worse, I'd be doin', if I stayed on wid him."

"Maybe ye're right there," Father Mehan replied with consideration. "But, then, think again of the sin ye'd be bringing on yeerself away from him."

"What sin?"

"Shure, the same that the world's full of. Suppose now, ye went to America. Isn't it beset with temptations ye'd be—a good-looking girl like you?"

Nanno felt the blood rising warmly to her cheeks, then, as suddenly, it left her cold, with the nauseating sense of the bitterness and horror of the world.

"Ye can't tempt them that have no want to do wrong," she cried impulsively, and Father Mehan smiled at her knowledge of life.

"There's a sayin' about an open door and a saint," he said; "though, maybe, the man what wrote it, had just been through one and wanted to persuade himself that he wasn't so bad after all. But God bless us, child, want or no want, ye'll find life filled with temptation, and mind ye, ye haven't got the easy time that a Protestant has in these matters. Ye can't divorce yeer husband and walk off wid some one else. Faith, it 'ud make this world easy enough if ye could, an' if there wasn't somethin' else

beyond it. 'Whom God hath joined together'—d'ye mind that—'let no man put asunder.' Shure, ye took him for better or for worse, an' faith, I know it's bad enough ye're gettin', but I've come across many that were worse."

Nanno shifted her position on the hard board on which she was kneeling; her hands involuntarily clasped themselves in perplexity.

"It's not the way I'm thinking of any other man," she said. "I know there be no divorce in the church—I know we can't marry again."

"Wisha, ye can marry again aisy enough; there's plenty that'll do it for ye over in America, but you know what the Church has got to say to that."

He paused. There had been a note of question in his voice with what he had said and, half expecting to be answered, he waited. Nanno did not reply.

"The Church'll forgive many sins;" he said; "shure, 'twill absolve a man from murder, if he gives himself up to the authorities,—but there's no forgiveness for that. I'm tellin' ye plainly, mind ye; ye'd be excommunicated, that's what 'ud happen ye. No church would let ye inside its doors, an' the hand o' God would be taken off of ye forever."

The words chilled Nanno. She shuddered. A picture rose in her mind of the terrible loneliness of such a state. Then, surely, nothing would be left but death; and even that would be but the gate into another life, more lonely, more horrible still. She shook the thoughts away from her. How could such a case ever be hers? How could the contemplation of such a thing ever enter her mind?

"I'm only warning ye, mind," Father Mehan went on. "I'm not sayin' that ye'd ever think o' doin' such a thing. But I tell ye this, that if ye leave Jamesy and go

away to America, the temptation of it, likely as not, might come in yeer way. 'Tisn't the way with men to see a young girl like yeerself goin' about alone in the world, without having something to do with her life. Men make women's lives, and women make men's, and both spoil each other sometimes. Shure, that's the way the life goes. Nanno!"

"Yes, father?"

"Go back to yeer husband, Nanno,—an' God'll show ye some way to do the right thing the first moment ye enter the door."

It was those last words that brought her to her decision. God would show her some way to do the right thing. All her faith rose up and grasped the belief of that and, with a new feeling in her heart, she left the chapel.

The dusk fell, and the evening closed in as she walked back the five miles to Glenlickey. She did not notice the distance. She did not mind that the roads were hard, unyielding, tiresome to her scarce recoverd strength. She would so soon be a mother—she tried to think cheerfully of that; and then God would show her. God would show her —how, she did not dream, but He would reveal that, and on that she counted most of all.

There was no sound of the threshing machine as she climbed up the hillside over the resisting field of stubble to the farm; but she had not expected it. The evening had finally set in, and she did not anticipate finding any of the hands there at all. By that time, they had all gone home.

There was no light in the kitchen as she entered. Even the fire in the grate had died down to one small point of red. The door was open. The place seemed

deserted. Yet still she hoped, still she believed; waiting for the sign.

Silently she moved across to the fire, thinking that she might make it up for Jamesy's return; and then, at that moment, a sign was given—hurled at her with the force of God.

Her foot had kicked against a chair, making a noise which, however slight, sounded disproportionate in the surrounding stillness. She heard the murmur of Jamesy's voice coming from the bedroom, the door of it opened stealthily, and Mrs. Doran, her hair scattered over her shoulders, stood peering into the uncertain light.

God had shown her the sign—that was all she could think—God had shown her the sign. With a cry that she smothered with her hand, she ran out of the room into the yard—out of the yard into the fields, and on and on, till she reached the night.

CHAPTER IV.

John Troy had gone into Anesk to inspect a new combined reaper and binding machine, and Bridget, her stout arms bared to the elbow, was turning the wheel of a cutter in accordance with the supply of turnip-tops that Patsy thrust into the receiver. The clean, crisp sound of the knife severing the stalks, like the grinding of hay between a horse's teeth, was kept up with intermittent pauses, filled in by Bridget's voice demanding a greater speed with the supply.

No day in October could have seemed more like the poetic conception of Autumn. The sun was burning brightly and the shed under which they worked, cast sharp-edged shadows on the ground. Through the warmth of the sunny air, there came at times the breath of a breeze that just tingled the cheeks, and, as though in answer to it, a leaf, brilliant in the last colors it had assumed, would flutter from the trees into the yard.

Neither of the workers in the shed was conscious of these puffs of wind that each time called a leaf to its last resting place. Bridget was too concerned with hurrying through her work; Patsy too engaged in shirking it.

They did not even notice Nanno's figure as she turned slowly from the lane and entered through the open gate into the yard. She was almost beneath the roof of the shed, before Bridget looked up. When she did see her, her hand fell from the handle of the wheel and her mouth opened in astonishment.

"Glory be to God, is that yeerself?" she exclaimed, while surprise was still overmastering curiosity.

Nanno nodded her head, and in her attitude, there was that which at once aroused Bridget's suspicions.

"What's on ye, in the name o' God?" she asked. "What's on ye?" She pushed Patsy away with his armful of turnip-tops, and came out of the shed. "What's happened ye?" she went on and then, taking Nanno by the arm, she led her into the kitchen.

When they were inside, Bridget closed the door and, crossing to the settle, sat down with folded arms and scrutinized her daughter. It was obvious to the most uncritical eye that something was the matter. In Nanno's eyes was the wandering, unsettled look of one whose mind is wavering with uncertainty and apprehension. Her face was white with the want of sleep, and her clothes looked damp and clinging.

For two hours after she had left Glenlickey, she had walked feverishly in any direction that her footsteps brought her. Nothing was conscious to her mind beyond the fact that God had shown her a sign. Had that evidence come at any other moment, she might even have passed it by, overlooked it; but at that peculiar instant, when her mind, spurred by faith and alive with the enthusiasm of belief, was ready to accept the slightest token as an ispiration of the divine, she found it impossible to see anything other than as a sign from God: in what had met her on her home-coming.

When those two hours had passed and her reason had adjusted itself, she turned to the contemplation of what she would do and where she would go. The thought of returning to Glenlickey she put out of her mind. The sign had been given her and she knew that she would never go back again. Only one course was palpably left open to

her. She could go home to Rathmore. But even that, could not be followed without thought or consideration. How would Bridget receive her? Could the hardness of her heart ever refuse to soften, when she knew the truth—when she understood? Nanno climbed over a hedge and, taking shelter behind it, sat down in the field on the coarse grass.

For some hours she remained there, the heavy dew drenching her clothes, the cold night wind seeking out the scantiest parts of her attire, until her body was inert, her mind numbed, and she was forced to thrust her hands into her breast to keep the life in them. The night was not the time to surprise them; she knew that. The unexpected return of any one at such an hour would only exaggerate the sense of its importance; and when she thought of John Troy opening the door of the kitchen and peering out into the darkness, she decided to stay where she was.

After a time sleep reached her, but it was only the outcome of exhaustion. A shower of rain some half-hour later, awakened her. Then she lay listening to the movements of an animal in the hedge beside her. It might have been a weasel, or a rat. She vaguely wondered as she heard it, what it was doing; whether in that lonely place it felt as much alone as she did. Once more, then, she fell asleep.

When she woke again the daylight was beginning to merge its way out of the east. A cold and ugly gray shimmered in the sky; it looked as though some milky liquid were forcing its way into a mass of ink. Slowly and slowly the gray became predominant, and the blackness of the night faded away before it, until the whole sky, with the exception of one gleam of light before her, was one thick web of scarce illumined light. The heathered

hills all around had no color in them. Their purple was a dead and faded brown. Nothing stirred. It seemed as if the dawn was breaking on a world that was dead. No living thing answered to it; even Nanno felt impotent to move. But at last the gleam of light in the east strengthened. By infinite degrees it became more intense, until at length the half-disc of a white and pallid sun rose up over a hill, looked at the world, and the colors of things crept into them. Vague uncertain shadows fell behind the trees; a bird fluttered out of the branches and flew again into cover. Then a yellow light came into the sun. Nanno felt the warmth of it feebly breathing on her face. At last, with a whirring of wings and an oft-repeated note, a lark rose out of the field, soared upwards, and the day was born.

Soon afterwards, she rose to her feet, There were some seven or eight miles in front of her before she reached Rathmore, and it was then, judging by the day, well after seven. Her blood was chilled, her body numb. She could only walk with difficulty. Every step she took racked her limbs with pain. She could feel that her lips were white, and the weakness that possessed her, compelled her again and again to rest by the side of the road. But at last Troy's Lane was reached. It was an effort beyond her comprehension by which she reached the five-barred gate. Had the distance been any greater, she must inevitably have failed; and when Bridget led her into the kitchen, she sank on to the first chair that was near, her breach coming in short, labored gasps, that told of her exhaustion.

"Wisha, God help us, what's wrong wid ye?" Bridget persisted, her curiosity at last predominating.

"Can I have something to eat first?" Nanno asked, as quietly as her labored breathing would permit. "I'll

tell ye everything then." She put out her hand on to the table to steady herself, and Bridget, at last convinced that, unless she complied with this request first, it would really be physically impossible for her to hear anything or satiate her curiosity, hurried to the cupboard in the wall and produced from a loaf of soda-bread—baked in the ashes—a teapot, and the other necessary ingredients for a hasty meal.

With the warmth of the hot tea, Nanno revived very quickly. The dead, uncertain light left her eyes, color crept into her cheeks, and her lips, that were white, assumed again that full depth of red, in which the deepest note of her bodily attraction lay.

Bridget watched her musingly as she ate the bread and butter and drank the tea.

"Is it the way ye had no breakfast for yeerself?" she asked, as Nanno poured out a second cup.

"It is. I've had nothing."

"An' what in the name o' goodness made ye come away so early in the mornin'?"

"'Twas not in the morning I came away at all—'twas last night."

"Last night! Yirra, what the deuce are ye afther doin' that for?"

Then Nanno told her everything. Indirectly, Bridget had heard of the way that Jamesy was treating her. She did not admit it to Nanno, but then, she did not know that his conduct had been as bad as this.

"Wisha, God help us—an' what have ye come back here for? Tellin' me won't save the fat from the fire. Shure, I can't do anything to stop him—deuce o' fear I can."

For a moment or so, Nanno looked steadily out of the window. Without any sense of observation, she watched Patsy turning the wheel of the cutter for himself.

Had he been asked to do that intead of feeding the machine with armfuls of turnip-tops, his labor would have been more willingly given. Even in Bridget's absence he worked energetically. But to Nanno all this was lost. Everything seemed blurred, as through a gauze. In the tone of her mother's voice, in the impression which her question gave, Nanno felt the impending finality to all which she could depend upon in the world. But it had to be told. She had made up her mind never to return to Glenlickey. Troy's Farm in Rathmore was at that moment the only place she looked to for security. At last she turned round from the table and faced Bridget's inquiring look.

"Shure, I don't want ye to stop him," she said. "Ye couldn't if ye tried. I'm never goin' back to him again. I've done with him. 'Tisn't the way one was meant to live, to be treated as he treated me. An' there's no changin' him whatever. I want to come back here and work as I used to. I'll help more'n I ever did before I went abroad."

As one word followed another, Bridget's face grew more and more contorted with incredulity and surprise. It was almost an unheard-of thing in those parts for a woman to leave her husband, however he ill-treated or was unfaithful to her. Women suffered lives that were hell upon earth; their pride was beaten out of them with whatever instrument came first to the man's hand; their honor was outraged, their homes desecrated and impoverished by the curse of drink; yet they seldom complained, and only one in a hundred had the courage to face the anger of the Church or the satirical mercy of the world and break away from it altogether. As a rule, they took to drinking themselves and drowned their sorrows, as one drowns an unfledged bird, whenever they became un-

bearable. The simple, domestic happiness of a home was seldom understood; but to think that her daughter should take upon herself the exception and decide to leave her husband, however he ill-treated her, was more than Bridget could understand. It broke down all the canons laid down by Church and custom and, when once it had penetrated her mind to be believed, her anger rose to the surface and shone relentlessly in her eyes.

"Is it come back here as if ye were never married at all?" she asked. "Is it come back here and be a burden on the man what brought ye up, an' we payin' two hundred and thurrty-wan pounds to get a match for ye? Yirra, glory be to God; may the Lord Almighty give ye sinse! I'd sooner see him bate the deuce out o' ye, than have the shame o' people seein' ye back here again—I would so."

The old dread of life came back into Nanno's eyes again as she listened dully to what her mother said. Up till then, there had been some vague and childish hope in her mind that she would find a home again in Rathmore. Quaintly, almost, she had imagined that all she had suffered during the past eight months would make atonement to John Troy for the conditions of her birth, and that from every point of view it would be seen right to protect and guard her from the horribleness of her existence with Jamesy Ryan. All this she had reasoned in a simple way with herself, fully believing it to be the only aspect in which the matter could be regarded. And now, in less than five minutes, she had heard, from her mother's own lips, an absolutely different point of view—one without mercy or restraint—yet one as legitimate as, those few moments ago, her own had seemed to her.

They had given two hundred and thirty-one pounds to secure for her a husband; therefore, what right

had she to return and place herself once more upon them for support? Life, hard as she thought she had considered it, was yet not so easy as she had supposed. For this, indeed, was life; the bolting of doors, the barring of ways against those weakened by oppression—against those hampered by distress. In an untutored way she saw things as the scientists see them; though the phrase, "survival of the fittest," would have meant nothing to her. Hampered from the first by the stain of her birth, and fettered afterwards by the chains of her belief, she was not equipped to battle against the strong, the strength of life's laws which are inviolable. There are some who unfit themselves with vice for the battle of life; there are others whom circumstances unfit; but Nanno was one of those against whom the laws of the universe were waging their force; and struggle how she might, nothing but the hand of divine omnipotence, could raise her on to the crest of the wave.

As Bridget finished speaking, Nanno rose slowly to her feet. In her face there was an expression of resignation, in her eyes lay the knowledge of her fate. When human nature comes face to face with the inevitable it behaves very like an animal that has struggled for a time in the hands of its captor and then walks quietly, with glazed eyes, to its doom.

To Nanno, at that moment, it seemed the end of everything. Life had no road to offer her.

"I won't be stayin', then," she said quietly. "'Tisn't right I should be a burden to any. 'Twas the way I thought—but shure, what's that matter now? Don't be tellin' himself I came back. There's no call for him to know I'm treated that way."

As far as it was possible, Bridget's heart softened; the principal reason being that she was satisfied by the readi-

ness with which Nanno had fallen in with her views. Then, again, she was pleased because she believed that Nanno was going back to her husband, and the scandal that she feared would be averted. Accordingly, she did what at any other time would not have entered into her consideration.

"There's a power more o' sinse in ye than I'd ever have imagined," she said and, with impulsive determination, she went into the bedroom that she shared with her husband.

"Why in the name o' goodness wouldn't ye be sittin' down while ye'd be standin' there?" she called out.

Nanno complied with the grotesquerie of her request and waited until she returned.

When Bridget came back into the kitchen, a piece of paper, dirty almost beyond recognition, was flapping in her hand. She handed it to Nanno. It was a ten-pound note, scored with the addresses of many people who had passed it, begrimed with the dirt of the many through whose hands it had come, and patched with stamp paper across a line where it had once been torn in two.

Nanno looked at it questioningly, then she turned her eyes to her mother's face. Bridget explained.

"That's what we owe Jamesy out o' the dowry," she said. "He let tin pounds stand over. Yirra, why wouldn't he? Ye take it to him, maybe 'tis the way he's wantin' it; though I'd make damn sure he didn't spend much of the other two hundred an twinty-wan on ye. Did he?"

Nanno did not reply. She took the note without realizing the value of what she held, and then Bridget accompanied her to the gate.

"If ye take my advice," she said, as Nanno departed, "ye'll go into Foley's on yeer way down shtreet, and take

a sup o' whisky. Ye'll want all the shtrength ye've got for the next week or so. I'd give it ye meself if we had it."

Nanno nodded her head as though she were in a dream. As though she were in a dream, she stumbled unsteadily down the lane, the ten-pound note still grasped unconsciously in her hand. What she was going to do, did not occur to her. Life seemed suddenly to have exhausted all its possibilities. It stopped abruptly, as did the street of Rathmore with the sea-wall.

When she reached the main road, she stood there, uncertainly, looking from right to left in a dazed bewilderment. A car approached her from the village, bumping laboriously on its ill-formed springs. She waited and watched it. As it came nearer, she saw it to be the mail-car on its way into Anesk. Fitzgerald, who had driven them that night when she and Jerningham had gone into Anesk, had risen to the position of mail-car driver since she had left Rathmore. He saluted her with a broad smile of pride upon his face.

"Good mornin', Nanno," he said jovially, pulling up the horse with a native disregard for the time to which he was a slave. "Begorra, it's a pity ye can't be drivin' into Anesk agen wid me. D'ye mind the night I brought ye in along wid Mr. Jerningham?"

She nodded her head.

"Well, begorra, I must be gettin' on," he added, still obedient to his habit of expectoration. "Bigob, I'm a governmint servant now—tisn't as if I had an hour to spare—it is not."

He was just about to whip up, when Nanno laid her hand detainingly on the step of the car.

"Would ye take me into Anesk?" she asked impulsively.

"I will, o'course. Climb up the other side." He moved a mail-bag to make room for her.

She obeyed him at once. It was not a moment when she wished to consider. This was going to be the beginning of a new life to her. A new road had suddenly been opened up before her eyes. She clutched the ten-pound note tenaciously in her hand; her face turned towards Anesk. Glenlickey, Rathmore, Troy's Lane—they were all behind her. The fresh wind, stinging with the sea, blew on her cheeks and through her earthen-colored hair. Everything lay in front. With that ten pounds—by every right her own—she thought that she could face the whole of a new existence.

"Go fast," she said. "Drive fast—I like goin' fast."

The old horse clattered on like a mechanical toy and, growing into the distance, the round tower pointed like a needle into the sky behind her.

BOOK III.

THE WORLD, THE FLESH, AND THE LAW.

CHAPTER I.

It is a fallacious idea to think that one must come to London to see life. Life is evident in many places, before one reaches the vast metropolis. The pivot upon which turns the great human machine is certainly there; in fact, everything is mechanical—vice, virtue, work, even the mere act of breathing. One does not inhale the air in London with any intention of benefiting one's lungs; one does it mechanically, for the bare sake of existence. When, as inevitably they must do in this atmosphere, the ambitions lie dead, people work on mechanically; this man painting pictures, that man writing books. The giving to the poor, the praying to a God—if done at all—is carried out with a mechanical accuracy that will split hairs or subdivide into parts the point of a needle. The very vices, the very appetites, are pursued or obeyed with a mechanical regularity that is the last word upon scientific precision. The working man gets drunk on Saturday night; on that day on which his salary is paid, the young clerk gratifies his appetites. Those who can afford it, move out of town when the season is over, and there, whether it be in the country or abroad, they are like ships without ballast, engines without lubricating oil. If deprived of their environment for long, they would rust or become obsolete; they cannot live without their constant material supply of fuel. Action is never spontaneous with them; sensation, feeling, or expression—none of these are spontaneous; truth is the least spontaneous of them all.

Their society is a mechanical contrivance like a Dutch clock, the weight of which is public opinion swinging a pendulum of avarice. Conversation is mechanical; every one talks as though they were engines in motion, with piston rods entering and receding from the cylinder at given moments that never vary. The dining out, the lunching in, the going to theaters, the playing at bridge—all these things are mechanical functions of the human machine, performed with automatic precision and accuracy. If a man once says what he feels, if, ignoring the monotonous hum of the engine, he once speaks from his heart—speaks earnestly, not rolling the words up in the tinseled paper of a jest—he is ostracized—condemned. Even modesty is mechanical. The things which we all know, yet do not like to speak about, are hidden in songs or insinuated in prose, and the people who call a spade an implement will pay impossible prices to listen to them for hours. But once let those things be treated honestly for what they are, in such a way that lessons can be learned from them, then society—the clergy—the city itself will hold up its hands in shame. In London it is truly called a scientific age. How to live is the everlasting question; never why to live. And there are scientists growing gray in their laboratories, striving to invent a way to do it.

This is life in London, as it is in all the great cities of the world. Wherever two or three are gathered together in the name of God, there there is some hope of getting at the truth; but gather them together in the name of advancement, and the mechanical dirge of vice and virtue, right and wrong, will make itself the dominant keynote of existence. Surround yourself with the handiwork of men's fingers, and your outlook will reach its limit with the fifth storey—the fact that a sky exists will be beyond your comprehension. It is only where the trees grow

straight and the grass is green, that a man can get near to the heart of things—away from the whirr of the machine.

In this atmosphere, strangely untouched by it, peculiarly undisturbed, Philip Jerningham lived, moved, and had his being. In the daytime he entered the workshop, where the cracking of belts and the buzzing of wheels, was almost deafening to the ears, and there, at the lathe which we all must turn, he wove out the pattern of his life. The competition was keen. He did not mind that. While it lasted, he gave his fullest energies to it; but when the house closed for the day, when the men carried away their human machinery for toil in pleasure and its kind, Jerningham became a different man. During those hours when he was at rest, he lived, and it was life that was not mechanical.

A dress-suit hung in his wardrobe at Plowden Buildings; it was almost worn out from want of use. He frequently smiled when he looked at it. When he went to a theater, it was because he wanted to see a play, not because he felt compelled to witness this actor and that actress in their latest rôle. On these occasions, he sat in the pit, whilst the man who had lost money to him over a deal on 'change during the day, dressed mechanically in an evening suit and lolled in the stalls. If he went into the country for a week-end, he put on an old suit and departed by himself. The absence of bridge-parties, or golf, at a wayside inn did not concern him. He was himself his own fuel, his own impetus. When he gratified a desire, it was his own, spontaneously his own; not one that he had read about or heard of another man possessing. If ever he dined out, he made conversation out of things that he had thought about himself, not from those topics which he had heard discussed at a luncheon party the day before. He said, moreover, what he felt, instead of echoing what

every one else was feeling. And for all of these reasons, he was not a social success. Accordinagly, he eschewed society, and avoided that class of woman with whom he might have married.

There was no doubt about it, he was a dull companion at a dinner-party. Nowadays, a man who says what he thinks always is. It is the being able to say the opposite of what one feels, the ability to pervert the truth with a smart brilliancy, that makes one interesting to one's fellow-creatures. The man or woman who can prove that black is white, or defeat the wisdom of a proverb that has guided people's lives from the days of Solomon, is an acquisition anywhere—invaluable. Jerningham could not do this. He was not brilliant; he was never smart. The London man and the London woman are shaped in a mold of insincerity. Jerningham was as opposite to the type as he could well be. It was, perhaps, on account of this, that the men who came up to Plowden Buildings were apt to place their confidences in his hands. He, at least, told them the truth about themselves, so far as he understood it; and when a man has been in London for some years, he will go far to hear the truth, if there is any grit left in him.

From all this it may be inferred that Jerningham's life was comparatively a quiet one. Amongst those who were intimately acquainted with him, he was known as the bachelor; and not one of them, with the greatest stretch of imagination, could conceive the possibility of his ever marrying. It was not because he shunned women, or in any way adopted the attitude of a Benedict. Women, as has been said before, had been to his rooms; but not one of them had entered his life. A photograph of his mother stood prominently on the mantelpiece in his chambers, but it was the only picture of a woman that the room con-

tained. Beyond that, there were no photographs of any sort; steel engravings, woodcuts, and old prints were the only decorations on the walls. Essentially it was the habitation of a bachelor; the rooms of a man who loved them for the hardness of their chairs and the never-varying appearance they possessed. When a man lives by himself, he never alters anything; he only replenishes. Chairs stand forever in the same position as they were placed when first they were brought into the room and a corner decided for them. Let a woman cast her eye over the arrangement of things, which three weeks before she has decided to be perfect, and nothing is left alone. Impressions to a woman are never sacred things.

To Jerningham, returning from Ireland, where he had passed a holiday that was after his own heart, the old things in their old positions were of the greatest consolation. He found it intensely hard to get back again into harness, but it was not so difficult to return in the evening to the Temple and seat himself in the old wood-bottomed chair that once he had unearthed from a pile of dust and purchased in an auction-room.

With these surroundings, one pictures to oneself a man advanced in years, with hair that is gray on the temples; but that is not accurate of Jerningham. Gray's Inn, Lincoln's Inn, Clifford's Inn, the Temple, are filled with men living, much as Jerningham lived, who are yet young, yet on the strenuous side of life. If the family Bible, which had long since found its way into the hands of a bookseller in the midland counties, was correct, Jerningham was only thirty-four. He still looked at life out of young eyes; still had dull visions of a future. From what direction it was to come he was not sufficiently introspective as to imagine; but whenever a play stirred him, or a piece of music touched his inherently unmusical soul, he

fancied that one day a woman might come into his life, upset all his principles, alter all his goings, and change the invariable positions of his chairs.

So far, she had not made her appearance, and he was sufficiently contented with conditions as they were, not even to want to watch for her. The taking of things as they came, was his motive. He had hated the return to work and city hours; but he had not flinched from accepting it. Perhaps the hardest trial he had had for some time, lay in being compelled to refuse a pressing invitation from Fennel to go back to Ireland the next summer. Nothing he could do would put any stability into the foreign markets, and so he was compelled to stand at the wheel. It had been a grievious disappointment. The wild freedom of the life he had lived there had found a lasting echo in the unconventionality of his nature. His interest in the people themselves, and most particularly in Nanno, had been deeply roused. He misunderstood them, as every one does, and that, in itself, made them interesting. For the next year, the Irish question had been one that he discussed—as every Englishman does after his first visit—with fervid enthusiasm.

When, therefore, a client invited him to meet an Irish member of Parliament at dinner, he accepted; notwithstanding the fact that nearly two years had gone by, since he had been staying with the Fennels, and all the impressions that he had then received were dull and rusty.

"An Irish member of Parliament!" he exclaimed to himself. A representative of the very people whom he wished to understand—an Irishman of the Irish.

The dress-clothes were taken down from the wardrobe and brushed. The trousers were unearthed from the mattress of his bed, where they had taken upon themselves an accumulation of fluff, that utterly altered the appearance

of their material. He hunted for white ties, and could not find them; he cursed at the obduracy of his stud-holes. It was a social event. He was about to meet a man who could talk to him on a topic that he was absorbingly interested in. It was not going to be an ordinary march into a nine-course meal, where you had neither time to eat nor converse, by reason of the kaleidoscopic passing of the dishes. On other occasions, he would not have minded when his bootlace broke; on this he swore, and it was an oath of some substance.

A hansom took him West, and, as he was being carried along, his mind reverted to the various impressions that he had gleaned out of Ireland two years before. With vivid detail, he recalled that day of the Pattern, when he had stood and watched the line of supplicants moving round the holy well in Rathmore. Clearest above them all, rose the face of Nanno Troy, lit with the fervor of a belief which, ever since, he had tried and, ever since, had failed to really understand.

These reminiscences lifted him completely out of himself and, before he was actually aware of it, the cabman had pulled up, with a skidding of hoofs and a tinkle of bells.

Jerningham walked into the drawing-room as a man for a wager walks into a den of lions. His reward was to be the Irish member of Parliament.

Mrs. Hilton, his hostess, was engaged in talking to a carefully dressed man, who was listening to her in that attitude of one who is waiting to hear the sound of his own reply. For Jerningham, it was a painful moment. Then, to the chagrin of the carefully dressed man, Mrs. Hilton turned, before he could begin his answer, and held out her hand. Jerningham grasped it with relief.

"You just complete the number," she said. "Let me introduce you to Mr. Mahony, the member for Ardcashel."

She effected the introduction with consummate ease. "You'll take in my daughter," she added, as she moved away.

Jerningham felt a momentary sense of disappointment, as he looked at the man with braided trousers. It was not exactly that Mahony was elaborately dressed, but that he seemed so potently aware of the existence of his attire. There was no suggestion of a man of the people about him.

"I visited Ireland for the first time two years ago," Jerningham began tentatively.

Mahony nodded.

"So long as you only visit it," he replied, "you're all right. Don't go and live there. I've just come back from America. Fine country that, if you like."

"America—yes—but Ireland——"

Mahony interrupted.

"They know how to entertain in America," he went on. "You talk about hospitality and unconventional cosmopolitanism in London—New York can give it a street and to spare. I've been over here now for eighteen years, and never have I been so hospitably treated as I was for those three weeks in New York."

"But don't you live in Ireland?" Jerningham asked.

Mahony looked at him quietly and smiled.

"Live in Ireland?" he repeated. "No, no, I live in London—have done so for a good many years. You don't think a man could *live* there, do you? Ah, well, if you've only visited it once, you wouldn't know. How long were you there?"

"A fortnight; and from what I saw of it——"

"Well, you can't see much in a fortnight. If you'd eaten soda-bread for fourteen years or so, and only had meat once a week, and that always mutton, you'd be

glad to come to London. There are places here, where you can get steak."

"Then living out of Ireland is a question of food?"

There was a cold gibe in the back of Jerningham's voice. The member for Ardcashel took it imperturbably.

"Figuratively—yes," he replied. "Of course, sentiment is all very well—you English, though you do so hate to hear it, are full of it—but perhaps you're not acquainted with Ardcashel? There is a large work-house on one side of the town and a colossal lunatic asylum on the other. Both are always full to overflowing. In the town itself there is a cattle-market, the cobbled stones of which I believe I have seen washed—there are also thirty-nine public houses, which are known as the thirty-nine articles and, for the rest, we have the police——" He turned to a lady who was standing close at hand.

"Have you nerved yourself?" he asked.

"For what?" she said.

"Mrs. Hilton told me I was to take you in to dinner."

Jerningham turned away to seek out his partner, and from that moment the dinner became the function that he dreaded. Miss Hilton, flaxen-haired and aged to suit the convenience of her mother, was as a drum in conversation. You tapped her with a question; she emitted a hollow reply. Jerningham labored through the first course with her, as people who are competing to see how much food they can consume. A topic was exhausted with every second spoonful of the soup that they raised to their lips. With each one, he said what he thought; she replied what she had heard her mother say at dinner-parties extending over the previous fortnight.

At last that course was ended. He saw with relief the

half-empty plate disappear from before his eyes, and then a voice behind his chair said:

"Sherry, sir?"

He felt a remembrance that gripped him as a vice grips a bolt. For a brief moment he did not answer. He looked straight ahead. Then the voice repeated:

"Sherry, sir?"

He half turned in his chair and looked up.

"Yes," he said, "yes."

It was Nanno—Nanno Troy—Nanno Troy, dressed as a maid, with white cap, streamers, black dress, and earthen-colored hair.

CHAPTER II.

In that moment, they recognized each other, and from that moment Jerningham scarcely took his eyes away from her. As she moved from one guest to another on the opposite side of the table, he watched her face. As she asked each man or woman the same question that she had asked him, he listened to her voice. But she was changed —almost imperceptibly, yet irrevocably, she was changed. He put it down to the difference of her dress, to the complete inversion of her environments. Nanno Troy, in a homespun skirt, with uncovered head and heavy boots, could not possibly look the same as she would with a starched cap and plain black cotton dress. He was content to account for it in that way. The pathetic drooping of her mouth, the solemnity of the big gray eyes, the wistfulness of her expression—none of which really indicated that she was perceptibly older—all these he believed to be the result of the alteration of her environment.

The thought that life might have come her way since he had last seen her, the idea that she might have suffered, might have encountered experience, never entered his head. A man is peculiarly dense in seeing the possibilities of a woman's existence. He imagines that she moves from childhood into girlhood, girlhood into marriage, without one moment's insight into the seething mass of human nature that is churned at her feet. He believes that she retains an untutored spirit of innocence, until that moment when, in his arms, she learns the motives of

men and women. It is to teach her life that he marries her; it is to him he expects her to look for all the knowledge of the world that she is ever to learn. And this is not a condition that can be bought; he must win it. In return, he sacrifices his freedom, and it is a sorry state of affairs, when he finds that he himself is the pupil—the pupil of the child who has learned already.

Jeringham, calling to mind the expression on Nanno's face as she made her round of the well, could not conceive that the difference which he saw in her was due to experience—the result of suffering.

"What can a girl know of life," he had often asked himself since his return, "who will drink the water from a well that the rain has fed, and believe it to hold more sanctity than any other gift of nature?"

While each course of the dinner was in mid-progress, she stood with the other maids at the back of the room, and during those moments he sometimes tried to catch her eye; but she would not look at him. Once a smile crept into his face to think that she was there. There were so many hundreds of serving-maids in London; but this was Nanno Troy. Sometimes he thought that it could not be she. That shy awkwardness which exists only among people in the country, and is a grace in itself, had almost vanished from her. She moved about the room with a certain sedateness which, through knowing her, though he could not reconcile it as being absolutely natural, was yet convincing to the rest. Her voice, too, notwithstanding that he had recognized it at once, was different, almost intrinsically altered. It seemed as if she could never return to the homespun skirt or the uncovered head again, and for a moment, he felt disappointed at having seen her. He would have preferred to have gone back to Ireland and found her once more in the fields, driving

home the cattle in the hush of the evening. But this, as the member for Ardcashel had said, was the sentiment of an Englishman.

At length, the ladies moved into the drawing-room, and Jerningham sat by himself, listening to the decided opinions of the Irish member of Parliament, who was still concerned with the hospitality of America.

"There wasn't a night," he was saying, "during the whole three weeks I was there, when I wasn't invited out to dinner."

"Did you go into any one's house?" asked his host.

"Well—no," he replied, "but the restaurants are good."

Jerningham turned round to find Nanno handing him a cup of coffee. He always took it black, but on this occasion he made her delay by pouring out milk. As he did so, he looked up once into her face.

Her eyes turned away from him and then, though it was but the briefest moment, he realized that there was a beauty in her face that was compelling, and he looked down, to find that he was pouring the milk into his saucer.

When the men followed the ladies into the drawing-room, he took the first opportunity of seating himself beside Mrs. Hilton.

"There is something I want to ask you," he said, when the machine of conversation was palpitating in every cylinder.

"Wicked?" she suggested.

"Not at all. I only want to know where you got your maid from, who was handing round the wine?"

Mrs. Hilton smiled archly.

"Well—it sounds wicked," she said.

"Probably—to ask any question about a woman in Lon-

don is to imply a chapter that has the leaf turned down; but there's nothing of that in what I want to know."

"Well"—Mrs. Hilton pouted—"I am going to tell you a fearful domestic secret. She's hired—just for the evening. We can't keep more than two maids in a house like this; so when I give a dinner, I get them in from Maynard's. Why?"

Jerningham invented why.

CHAPTER III.

How had Nanno become the neat waiting-maid, hired for an occasion into Mrs. Hilton's establishment? How had she discarded the country manners, the country ways, and taken upon herself the bearing of such girls, of whom one can see so many, quietly dressed, with an air of gentleness—those girls whom the necessity of fighting their own battle in life has neither robbed of virtue nor respect? They are to be found in offices, doing the work of men; they are to be seen behind counters, or attending tables in a restaurant. One meets them in the early morning, coming from the suburbs in the west, seated on the tops of omnibuses that bear them into the whirr of the city. Each one of them has her novel to read, and sometimes it is astonishing to see the taste that they display in their choice of books. The facetious, modern clerk, with his paper cuff-protectors, who endeavors to strike up an acquaintance with them, is treated with disdainful contempt. They know the value of their virtue and, though each day it is exposed to the wiles of life, they protect it jealously, assiduously. How, then, did Nanno, from being the ill-treated wife of a farmer in the wilds of Ireland, become one of these? How does human nature invariably adapt itself to the constant flux of change that whirls us along in the flood of its tide, yet leaves us ever fighting, ever struggling against the stream?

It is that unquenchable fire of hope, that eternal essence of optimism, without which this "sorry scheme of

things," could not continue, that is responsible for the wonderful adaptability of the human race.

Nanno had fronted a sea of troubles since that day when, leaving the farm in Rathmore, she had turned her face towards Anesk to begin life all over again. At the maternity hospital in Cork, her child had been born dead.

"Guess you had some accident?" the student had said.

"I did," she replied quietly, and the student had felt himself to be a man of insight.

When she was first told of it, the bitterness of her misery had seemed complete. The one life which had been created to understand her, to give her love and look to her for its dependence, she had been deprived of. For the few days during which she lay in that dreary, uncarpeted room and listened to the rumbling of the carts that passed by in the street below, she thought that the last blow had been given, the last stitch removed from the fabric of hope, which she had so persistently drawn about her.

But when once she was able to move about, she saw things differently. If from thenceforth, she was to be her own power of existence; if, through all the future, she was to look to herself for her own support, then the death of her child had been but a deliverance of Providence from a vital responsibility. She knew sufficiently of the world, to realize that a woman with a child and no husband starts life with a handicap that is well-nigh impossible to work away.

So fully did she realize this that, the morning on which she left the hospital, her prayers were concerned with thanking God for her deliverance; yet the moment that she had crossed herself, she cried as though her heart would break.

Two days later, when the sum of her capital was be-

ginning to lessen and, when various efforts to apply for employment of any kind had met with unsuccess, she encountered Nancy Foley, whose expulsion from Rathmore she had witnessed with such intensity of horror nearly two years before.

In the first moment of their meeting, the distressed girl would have avoided Nanno had it been possible. She turned hastily away, but Nanno followed and laid her hand detainingly on her arm.

"Shure, Nancy," she said, and the tone of her voice was irresistible. The girl faced her.

"Why d'ye speak to me?" she asked. "Weren't you one o' the girls that turned me out?"

"I'd have begged 'em not to do it, if a' be I'd seen it was any use."

For a moment Nancy looked at her incredulously.

"Ye wouldn't think what I'd done a sin?" she said.

"It don't be a question o' whether things be sins or not," said Nanno quietly—"but o' how they're goin' to be punished—whether they're goin' to be done agen, and who's goin' to forgive 'em. 'Tis the doin' o' things when they've once been forgiven, that makes 'em sins indeed."

Nancy looked at her in amazement.

"Who taught ye that?" she asked.

Nanno sighed. Experience had been her master, but no woman cares to admit it. She said nothing. Then Nancy slipped her arm through hers and together they walked through the streets, Nanno listening to all the confidences which her companion, with feverish haste and relief, poured into her ears; confidences which, up till then, she had been the only one to share with herself; confidences which were dragging at her heart and embittering every thought she had of life.

When she had finished Nanno raised her head.

"Will ye do something if I ask ye?" she said.

Nancy nodded. With the rush of relief that was overwhelming her, she would have done anything.

Nanno brought her to the church of Holy Trinity and, when the doors had swung to behind them, she had whispered:

"Go to confession—shure this is just what God meant it for."

When that was over, and the repentant girl had sobbed away her tears of gratitude in a shadowed corner of the church, they went home together, to the room where Nanno was lodging, and talked over their plans for the future. As yet, both of them were unable to look to anything definite, though Nancy had written to London, applying for a situation, the advertisement of which she had seen in the local papers. It was her determined intention to leave Ireland as soon as she possibly could. If this application which she had made, were to fall through, she had decided to go to America, whence a brother of hers had departed some five years before. They talked about the possibility of it then, as they sat there; and at last, remembering that two posts had been delivered since she had left her lodgings that morning, Nancy said she would go and see if, by any chance, an answer to her application might not have arrived. Nanno accompanied her. A letter was lying in the passage, underneath the aperture of the door. Nancy seized it eagerly. She tore it open, pulled out its contents and, from the folds of the paper, a postal order fluttered to the ground.

"Yeer fare to London," Nanno said quietly.

Nancy looked at it incredulously. She read through the letter with only a dazed conception of what it contained.

"Read it," she said, handing it to Nanno; and then

she stooped down to pick up the slip of paper on the floor.

"They want ye to go on Thursday," Nanno said, when she had glanced through it. "That's the day after to-morrow."

The tears rushed into Nancy's eyes. Now that the parting had actually come, and she had really found a friend to leave behind, the bitterness of it seemed overwhelming.

"But what'll ye be doin' wid yeerself?" she asked.

Nanno looked down the passage at the narrow, uncarpeted stairs that led up to the bedroom. For a moment, she put both hands over her face. Nancy could hear the breath passing between her fingers. Then she looked up.

"I'll be comin' with ye," she replied and, scarcely before the words had left her lips, she found Nancy's arms about her shoulders, the hot tears from her eyes upon her neck.

CHAPTER IV.

So had Nanno come to London. It frightened her at first. The ceaseless rushing of vehicles, the endless passing of people—all heedless, unconscious of her existence, except those who evinced a momentary interest in her face—depressed her with a sense of loneliness. These were, for the most part, men whose eyes happened on the dangerous humanity of her mouth, or the wistful dependence of her expression. Whenever one of them looked at her—as men, noting these things, do look at a woman—she hurried by with thoughts reverting to what Father Mehan had said to her in confession. Once, out of spontaneous curiosity, she had looked back over her shoulder. She had wondered whether the man's apparent interest in her would have continued when they had passed. She found that he was looking round as well. When he saw her action, he stopped. She turned away again and hurried on, her heart beating jerkily with apprehension.

For the first fortnight, although she applied for many of the situations which she saw advertised in the papers, she could not succeed in getting occupation.

"Have you done this kind of work before?" she was asked in every instance. And when she had replied in the negative, the persons interviewing her had pursed their lips, shook their head, glanced at her face, and said, "Good morning." She realized in those days how little the world cares or sympathizes with any one who is outside the pale of its personal consideration. Want, deg-

radation, pain, misery, only appeal to the sympathies of those who are directly or indirectly affected by them. The Good Samaritan will forever be an allegory.

Yet Nanno did not despair. The ease with which Nancy had obtained her position in a comfortable home, gave her heart to persevere. The only thing that had frightened her was the minimum to which her capital had been reduced. She had still possessed the sum available for one more week at her lodgings, which included a simple breakfast, whose simplicity consisted of lack of quantity rather than plainness of quality, when she applied for a vacant situation in the restaurant of Maynard's stores.

The man who had interviewed her, was one of those individuals, who—pitiable, no doubt—in the meager frock coat, thin trousers, and scanty underclothes, was a god in the presence of an inferior. He towered above Nanno, who was far from being small in height, and his hands clasped each other underneath his coat behind his back.

"Ever been in a restaurant before?" he had asked, criticizing her face with his eyes.

"I have not, sir."

"Irish—aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

He had smiled sententiously. He felt a man of the world, though he only left Shepherd's Bush behind him on Sundays.

"Well, I suppose you'd know how to bring tea and things to people if they asked for it?"

"I would, sir."

"Ever been in service?"

She shook her head.

"What side would you—er—approach a person whom you were going to —er—serve?"

He had put the question directly, and she had known that her chance of getting the situation lay in giving a direct answer.

"The left-hand, side," she had said without hesitation. Had she paused, she knew it would have lost her the chance, as surely as saying the wrong thing. She guessed, and he nodded his head—satisfied.

"You couldn't wait at a dinner-table, I suppose?" he had asked.

"I could not, sir."

"Ah, well," he replied, "that wouldn't matter so much. We undertake to teach you that." He gave her the impression that he was a member of the firm. She went away, in fact, with the belief that he was Mr. Maynard, not knowing that there was no such person.

"Are you accustomed to hard work?" he went on, studying her face with the same persistence. She felt his eyes watching her mouth. "*Hard* work, I mean," he had added.

A curious smile came into her eyes. A thousand remembrances were passing through her mind.

"I am, indeed, sir," she had answered, and a ring of conviction accompanied her words.

He stroked his mustache lovingly.

"How old are you?"

The question was put out of personal curiosity.

"Twenty-one."

A light of more evident interest came into his eyes. He stood watching her silently, all the while endeavoring to extract something from his teeth with his tongue, and, in the effort, making sounds that she felt disgusted with. It was a habit that was inseparable from him, and was the basis of her first impression of dislike.

"You'd look very well in the caps we provide," he told her.

She said nothing to that. Then he smiled encouragingly.

"You've got a remerkably pretty mouth—did you know that?"

He said it in a way that had seldom failed before with girls of Nanno's class. He thought he knew exactly the effect that it produced. Usually, they giggled affectedly. Nanno had merely turned away.

"Did you know that?" he repeated, with a trace of authority.

She shook her head.

"I did not, sir," she said quietly.

He smiled again. Of course she did know it, he had told himself. He had not gleaned an experience of women, to be deceived so easily. But the unconscious way in which she had denied it, attracted him.

"Well, look here," he had concluded confidentially, giving her the impression that he was exerting his own generosity—"come along here to-morrow morning at eight-thirty sharp, and I'll give you a week's trial."

She had thanked him genuinely and, watching her retreating figure, he had smiled, then turned to regard himself in one of the long mirrors with which these places endeavored to give an impression of space. The reflection suggested that he might curl his mustache a little more. He obeyed the suggestion. Two girls behind a counter in the distance watched him with ironic merriment.

The next morning at eight-thirty, Nanno was in her place. It was all a little strange at first. The ladies who had come into Maynard's for shopping and needed tea or lunch, were not the highest examples of patience. Women, intent upon purchases for their attire, seldom are.

The true spirit of combat is exemplified in them when they approach a milliner's counter. These ladies did not come to take a comfortable meal, unless it might so happen that their shopping was over, and even then, a slight delay in supplying them with their wants was dangerous. Nanno felt that everything and everyone was clamoring for her attention at once. By the end of that first day she was exhausted.

Then the routine of it began to grow on her. Mr. Mossop, the individual who had accorded her the week's trial, came to the superintendent of the restaurant at the end of that time and asked her what she thought of Nanno's abilities.

The superintendent was approaching the age of thirty-one, and Mr. Mossop had once—three years before—been attentive to her. She knew, of course, that Nanno was attractive, and it goes without saying that she knew her Mr. Mossop. There was nothing that she could think of to say against Nanno, and so her lip merely curled in casual consideration as she had replied to his question—

"As good as the rest—no better—what I mean——"

Mr. Mossop had bowed.

"I know what you mean," he had replied and, crossing to Nanno, he told her she might consider herself engaged.

The knowledge that she had succceeded inclined her, from simple gratitude, to work the harder; and in three weeks' time she was as useful in the restaurant as any of them. Every night, before she retired to bed, she thanked God in her prayers for His infinite wisdom in helping her to choose the life she had adopted. She did not mind the hard work; she even found continual interest in it. The constant change of people—some of whom occasionally addressed remarks to her—was as sufficiently a food for her mind as to alter her entire outlook on life.

There was also a string band during the hours that meals were served, and she was not without that love of music in her soul which tells of a strong natural force of emotion.

To this band, there were only three performers—a violin, a 'cello, and a piano. The girl who played the violin, interested her unceasingly; her playing was certainly by no means above the average, but whenever Nanno was for a moment at rest, she would watch her with increasing admiration. She hugged her instrument to her as she played, as thought she loved it. Her bow-arm swung so gracefully to and fro, as if it moved unconsciously; and sometimes the strings throbbed, and sometimes they cried; sometimes they seemed almost to laugh, and sometimes to whisper. To Nanno, who had never in her life heard anything better than the blind fiddler who had played the square dances at her wedding, this girl was possessed of strange and wonderful intelligence.

One day, she had seen Nanno watching her and she smiled, laying her cheek caressingly against the violin. A little while afterwards, while she was resting, she beckoned to Nanno as she passed.

"Do you play?" she had whispered.

Nanno shook her head.

"I wish I did," she had answered.

From that moment had sprung up an acquaintance between them, which had lasted as long—longer even than her connection with Maynard's, Limited.

And this, briefly, was Nanno's new existence. Being an attendant in the restaurant, she was paid a higher wage than the girl who served behind the counter, and was, accordingly, expected to live out, as they expressed it. The term implies that she did not sleep in those domiciles which Maynard's supplied for their employées, but paid for lodgings of her own—a fact upon which, as she came

to know the establishment better, she never ceased to congratulate herself.

In a little house amongst a row of many other precisely similar little houses, in a little street off the Fulham Road, she had found a bedroom, which combined the use of a sitting-room, for the sum of ten shillings a week. Her breakfast—in fact, all her meals, excepting those on Saturday afternoon and Sunday—were provided by the restaurant; and the eigth shillings that remained out of her wages she carefully put aside. Sometimes ladies or gentlemen who had said something to her—asked her for an illustrated paper or requested her to suggest an item to the band—would leave some coppers under the plate on the table. Gratuities were not forbidden. And these unexpected sums, she spent upon little adornments for herself or her bedróom. As time went on she came to take a quaint pride in her surroundings. She bought a picture of the Sacred Heart and hung it over her bed; she purchased simple vases, and, whenever flowers were not too expensive, filled them with gentle-smelling violets that brought a perfume of the country into the room. Then a new interest had come into her life—she began tó read. Miss Shand, the girl who played the violin, had lent her a novel, and she read it during the whole of one Sunday. Novels had never reached her in Ireland. As a bundle of fancies, she had heard Father Mehan disparage them from the pulpit and, until then, had never cared to look at them; but from that time they became a constant source of companionship. She saw life from different points of view. While she read, she became the characters that were before her, until she lived with them.

And all this time, Mr. Mossop had been studiously watching her. Whenever he entered the restaurant, he curled his mustache carefully beforehand. The superin-

tendent surveyed them jealously when he was speaking to her. Mr. Mossop never passed through the room without making some remark to her, and it usually conveyed a compliment, clumsily expressed and suggestively delivered. But, much as she disliked this form of attention, Nanno knew that she could not openly snub him. Her position depended entirely upon his clemency, and she dared not offend the sense of dignity, more essential to him than the clothes he wore.

Once, he had asked her lightly where she lived, and when she had vaguely told him the district, he had smiled benignly, bowing as though she were a customer.

"My dear girl," he had replied, with assumed politeness, "your address is registered upstairs in the office. There is no reason why you should not tell me."

For the next few days, she had expected that any evening he might come and see her, but when he made no appearance, she thought her fears were groundless.

A week later, as the establishment was being closed, he had brought her a bunch of lilies.

"They are my favorite flower," he had said sentimentally. "Pure—that's what they are—pure." He looked at her with languid eyes, an expression that he had always found to be irresistible. "Like you," he added—"like you." Then he had fallen into the habit of worrying his teeth; and, thanking him hurriedly, Nanno had turned away, the lilies held listlessly in her hand.

With the quickness of a woman's perception, she saw that he was a man who would quickly resent, not hesitating to work that resentment at the sacrifice of others; but with the gentleness of a woman's timidity, she did not know how to treat him. A man of that nature, placed in authority over any one, will always drive until he is driven. Nanno felt the weight of his authority so strongly

that, through want of experience, she feared it in proportion.

At last, one Sunday afternoon, when she was reading, the event that she had for some time dreaded, came to pass.

The landlady opened her door and said that a gentleman named Mr. Mossop wanted to see her.

"Did you say I was in?" she asked quickly.

The landlady looked at her in amazement.

"Well, aren't yer?" she said.

Nanno nodded.

"Could I see him in the sitting-room?" she inquired.

The landlady sniffed.

"I suppose so," she said at length. "'E's got a butt'nhole in 'is coat, and 'e looks respectable. Mind yer, I don't allow visitors as a rule. There was a girl here once——"

"Well, couldn't you tell him that?" Nanno interrupted, full of hope. "I don't want to see him."

Mrs. Hudson shook her head.

"'E looks respectable," she repeated, as though she had not heard Nanno's last remark, "so I don't hobject—just for this once," and with that she closed the door.

Nanno put away her book and gazed out of the window. What Father Mehan had said about men was quite true she thought. She wondered, simply, how he had known.

After a few moments, Mrs. Hudson had returned and announced that Mr. Mossop was waiting in the sitting-room.

"'E's got a silk 'at on," she added. "It surprises me 'ow you girls get 'old of gentlemen like 'im. I didn't, when I was your age."

Nanno did not reply. She walked through to the sit-

ting-room, as though she were about to face another ordeal of being engaged for a fresh situation.

Mr. Mossop rose, with his hat in his hand, as she entered.

"I took the liberty," he said, carefully choosing his words, "of dropping in. I happened to be passing."

"'Twas very good of you," she said. "Won't you sit down?"

He obeyed awkwardly, still holding his hat; and for the next few minutes their conversation had been strained and uncomfortable. The pose of authority had, for the time being, fallen from him. He felt ill at ease. Nanno was not conscious of being so afraid of him as when he talked to her in the restaurant.

"I was just going to have tea," she said after a while. "Would you be liking any yourself?"

"How charmingly you put that!" he said. "I should like it very much indeed."

She rang the bell and asked Mrs. Hudson to bring up tea for them both. The landlady went away, telling her husband that Miss Troy—as such Nanno had described herself—would likely be married in a few weeks.

As soon as she had left the room, Mr. Mossop rose and walked restlessly round the room, glancing at the tawdry oil-paintings of stormy seas that hung on the walls. When he had finished, he came hesitatingly to her side.

"You're very comfortable here, Miss Troy," he said and, with an assumption of paternal demonstration, he laid his hand on her shoulder.

Nanno felt the blood weaken in her. Her limbs seemed suddenly to lose their strength. For a moment she was powerless with a sense of apprehension; and, in that moment, thinking that she did not resent his attention, he bent over her, bringing his face close to hers.

"Wouldn't you give me a kiss?" he said. There was a tone of maudlin sentiment and passion in his voice. She heard it in his throat. Then she rose hastily, upsetting his balance in her endeavor to get away. He looked, and rather felt, a fool.

"Are you vexed?" he asked.

"Shure, I am, of course," she replied.

"What for? There's no harm done." He straightened himself to his extreme height. "Good heavens! there's many a girl in your position 'ud take it a compliment—what I mean, they wouldn't start up in a fuss, like what you do."

Nanno said nothing. It was the wisest and best course for her to adopt. Had she expressed what was in her mind, he would only have felt the more incensed.

"What's the matter with me?" he went on, when she remained silent. "Haven't I shown you every consideration since you've been attendin' in the restaurant?" When emotion controlled Mr. Mossop he frequently dropped his g's, but never his h's. "Who have you to thank for gettin' into Maynard's at all?" he persisted. "Am I nobody, as if I was to be treated like a bit of dirt—as contemptuosly as what you are? Am I?"

There was a note of aggression in his voice that frightened her. She knew that he controlled her period of service at Maynard's and could, by adroit misrepresentations, so prejudice her employers against her, that she would be dismissed.

"Shure, I'm sorry," she replied at last, turning towards him. "It wasn't the way that I meant anything disrespectful. I'm sorry."

Mr. Mossop looked at her more benignly. He felt that she was under his thumb. It seemed all so preposterously simple. He had only to say "Bah!" in a terrifying

voice and, with frightened eyes, she was at his heels. There was no element even of sport in it; but then, Mr. Mossop did not care for sport. He was essentially a man who bullied women. There is a playing of the game, even in these matters, but he was neither fitted, nor did he care for it.

Her apologizing to him on that, the very first occasion, had enabled him to take up the position that he always assumed with women; and he only dealt with those who came under his own personal authority. This position was one of terrorizing them, to which he resorted when his own physical blandishments failed. In the case of Nanno, he believed that, with time and care, he could terrorize her into all that he required and, content for the moment to acknowledge a postponement, he had accepted her apology with what he considered was remarkably good grace.

"Don't say any more about it," he said at once. "Perhaps I was a little carried away—I admit it. I've told you before you're an attractive girl—quite attractive."

He had stopped abruptly as Mrs. Hudson brought in the tea and then, still dreading every moment lest he should repeat his attentions, she sat down again and poured out a cup for him.

"You're the first Irish girl I've ever known," he said when he had half finished it. "What I mean, known any way well, intimately."

She shuddered mentally at the last word.

"Am I?" she said.

"Um—" His mouth was filled with bread and butter at the time; no other word was possible.

"What part of Ireland did you come from?"

Nanno looked out of the window.

"The south."

"Beautiful, isn't it?"

"Some parts of it are."

"I'm thinking of going to see the Lakes of Killarney next summer holidays," he said, forming the resolution as he said the words.

She closed her eyes, saying nothing.

"Have you been there?"

"I have not."

"Really now!—fancy that. I said—fancy that!"

"I never thought about it."

"Um—and why did you think of coming over here?"

"I don't know. I—I wanted to get work to do."

He looked at her sensuously.

"But a girl like you ought to have got married."

She did not reply.

"Perhaps you are thinking of it?" he suggested jealously. "Is that why you didn't want me to kiss you?"

"I haven't thought about it," said Nanno.

"What! there isn't a young feller after you?"

"There is not."

He drew his chair nearer to her.

"Come, then, give us a kiss," he said whiningly.

Nanno rose quickly to her feet.

"I suppose it's the way you don't know who you're speakin' to, Mr. Mossop!" she exclaimed.

"And who am I speakin' to, Miss Troy?"

"To some one that doesn't give kisses to anybody. Oh!—is it fair to be speakin' like this to me because I'm alone? I know 'twas ye got me to be attendant at Maynard's, but that's no call for ye to be askin' me to kiss ye. I don't kiss any one. Isn't that sufficient for ye?"

He laughed.

"You don't kiss any one—don't you forget it. D'you think I can believe that when I look at your mouth? Why, I can see kisses on it. Great Scott! That's what it's

made for—your mouth. You don't kiss any one! I'm not going to forget that." He stood up. "Why, girls have kissed me what have a good deal more reason to think something of themselves than what you have. One of the lady customers, what I went to see once on business—she kissed me—nothing else, perhaps. And you—you don't kiss any one! Good Lord!"

Nanno crossed to the door and opened it.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Mossop," she said, and she went into her bedroom, leaving him to his own discretion.

CHAPTER V.

THIS was the only way to treat Mr. Mossop. He had no respect for the girls who had once kissed him, while he treated with a certain amount of consideration those who had not; and the consideration that he had shown to Nanno from that day had made things perceptibly easier. The cessation of his more obvious attentions, however, did not for a moment imply that he had been disturbed from his purpose. Nanno had risen in his estimation. His determination to win her was probably more genuine and, if anything, more honorable. Moreover, he did not attempt to employ the same methods that he had already adopted. There were even moments when he thought that it might not be so unwise if he made her his wife. But this thought he would not allow himself to encourage. A sense of his own freedom was strong within him.

And so, Nanno had not been troubled any further. She knew that she was giving every satisfaction to her employers; the fact was proved by the celerity with which they recognized her ability to wait at a private table. Within four months of the time when she had first entered, they selected her to accompany one of the most experienced girls when a customer had ordered two attendants for a dinner-party. After this she was sent by herself; and when she had proved her efficiency, customers asking for her attendance again, her wages were raised, and she felt her position still more secure.

All this was bringing her to a happier outlook on life.

Compared with what she had suffered, her existence was the Nirvana of the Prophet. Her evenings were mostly her own. When they were not, she was engaged in attending at a dinner-party, which, to her, was always a constant fund of interest. There were times, perhaps, when she felt the loneliness of her position, yet she never ceased from thanking God for the infinite mercy which He had shown her. Her faith and the wonderful benefits of her church, were the greatest things in her life. She had not been robbed of these. Beyond that, she was comfortable; she really wanted for nothing. If she had not much companionship, the love of reading had entered into her interests. The only thing that she did not possess, was the love of any one or the love for any one; and so little had she seen of it in the world, that she did not think of it as a necessity. In time, she might possibly have become one of those women who, through loneliness in the early part of their life, lose the deeper sense of loving, and become old maids from choice rather than from necessity. That deeper, more profound side of her nature—the spirit of passionate love, the spirit of gentle maternity—had never been awakened in her by Jamesy Ryan; that such should have been the case, would have been a physical impossibility. Yet even Mr. Mossop—that coarse, unenlightened materialist—had seen its presence in her, had traced it to her lips, had been attracted by it. It was there, but she did not know it; it was there, but, not knowing it, she did not feel its needs or demands. The desires of love are mostly created in a woman; they do not fully develop in the ordinary course of evolution. With Nanno, there had been no one to create them, and so, she was barely conscious of the fact that it was in her nature to love passionately, fervently, devoutly—to cling blindly,

reverently, to the man who should so inspire her, with that same faithfulness that she devoted to her religion.

Nancy Foley occasionaly came to see her in her little rooms off the Fulham Road. They talked a lot together about their home; but Nanno, quiet, reticent, sensitive, never mentioned what had driven her from Rathmore. It was a secret that she kept bravely to herself. She never heard from Bridget. She never heard from any one in Rathmore, and she felt that she had separated herself from them forever; had made a life of her own and, as far as it was possible, she had determined to put the past irrevocably behind her.

Miss Shand, the violinist of Maynard's band, came sometimes to visit her, generously bringing her violin and playing for Nanno those pieces of music which the British public cannot listen to when it is drinking tea at the same time. To her, Nanno had told nothing, though the girl spoke confidentially of the conquests that she had made. There was very little reticence about Miss Shand, as a rule, but with Nanno, she felt a compulsion of reserve. Nanno was so obviously inexperienced, she thought, and many times she had checked herself in her confidences, lest she should shock this girl, for whom she had conceived a genuine regard.

In consequence of this, Nanno thought her to be spotless. She could not then have understood that, however great a sin may be, there may yet be a predominance of virtue in the person who commits it. This was not narrow-mindedness, but rather a lack of experience of life. Mr. Mossop, for instance, had been no temptation to her. She could not therefore understand that he would ever be a temptation to any girl. This was only her ignorance of the world. There are Mr. Mossops everywhere, and they find their prey.

These little variations composed the greater part of Nanno's life that is worth recording, when Jerningham had met her again, serving sherry and coffee at Mrs. Hilton's dinner-party.

She had gone home that night to her lodgings, when her work was finished, feeling dazed and mystified. Did it mean anything to her? she found herself asking. It seemed unanswerable, unless a sudden beating of her heart, a flushing of blood in her cheeks, could be counted as such. But she tried to take no notice of these. Jerningham had for so long been a dead personality to her, that the sudden meeting of him, and under those peculiar circumstances, might easily account for her agitation. She chose, in fact, to account for it in that way.

Yet, notwithstanding all her efforts to minimize the effect that their meeting had produced in her, there rose in the back of her mind, as a mist rises from the horizon on a July day at sea, all those comparisons which she had once been forced into making, when Jerningham was in Ireland and she was fighting against the impending fate of Jamesy Ryan.

For a long time into that night, she lay awake, endeavoring to thrust the circumstance out of her thoughts. Seeing him, as she had done, had shown her, more plainly than she had ever realized in Ireland, the immeasurable gulf that stretched between them. What interest he had evinced in her there, could not possibly exist in these new environments. She knew that. And it was not that she hoped against hope that it would—she persisted in telling herself that this was true—but that an insistent voice of Fate, like the monotonous note in a shell, forced upon her the fear that here lay the temptation of which Father Mahan had spoken.

At last she fell asleep, and in the morning, with the

daylight, the fears had dwindled into a far-distant perspective. Her imaginations had thrived like parasites upon the night.

The routine of daily work, brought her back again to a casual contemplation of the event, until, when two days had gone by, she had come to look upon it as a strange coincidence and fit it into a common groove.

On the third day it had practically passed out of her mind. She went about her duties as usaul, feeling an awakened interest in this person or that, who came in to take tea, after some hours of strenuous shopping in the various departments of Maynard's establishment. The band was playing Pierné's serenade; the clatter of teacups was incessant. Attendants kept passing to and fro with their trays. It was half-past four, the busiest time of the afternoon, and Nanno was fully occupied.

When, at length, all her customers were served, and she had a moment's respite from her labors, the swing doors at the end of the room opened, and Jerningham entered. She saw him at once. She noticed that, for a moment, he stood there as though looking for some one. She felt the blood tingling in her cheeks. All her powers concentrated themselves in an endeavor to look unconcerned.

At last his eyes fell upon her, and he crossed the room. When he reached her side he raised his hat. The other attendants stared at him and at Nanno.

"Have you got a vacant table?" he asked, in a low voice.

"There's one over there," she said, in the same tone. "Over in that far corner."

He thanked her, strode across the room, hung his hat upon a rack on the wall, and sat down at the table.

CHAPTER VI.

Nanno's thoughts, as she crossed to the table a moment later, to wait upon Jerningham, were clamoring for realization, as the hounds clamor round the huntsman on a frosty day. He had come to see her—but why?

"What do you give here?" he asked, when she approached the table.

She could not help smiling.

"What do you want?" she said. "We can give you anything, sir."

"Tea?"

"Of course."

"And bread and butter, I suppose?"

She bowed her head in acquiescence and turned away.

"Wait a moment," he said.

She came back again.

"I want to have a talk with you."

It seemed as though she did not understand.

"Can't you spare a minute or two?"

"I should get into trouble," she said, looking steadily at him with her large eyes. "We're not supposed——"

"Of course—I can understand that. Well—bring me the tea, will you?"

Jerningham's eyes followed her as she moved away. He was trying to fill the gap of time which stretched between that moment of his last meeting with her in Ireland. He realized the attempt to be futile. Some indefinable expression in her face, led him to feel that much had hap-

pened—there his imagination stopped, failing to take the flight.

When she returned with the tea and the bread and butter, he watched her closely as she laid them on the table. Her cheeks were more delicate in color than when he had seen her in Ireland. The absence of outdoor life had, no doubt, been the cause of that. But in many other respects, she seemed more fragile—more ethereal. Her figure, markedly improved by the carefully made cotton dress, looked more formed, more symmetrical, than it had done in the close-fitting bodice and uncouth skirt of home-spun. Her hair was more glossy; her head looked to be more daintily posed upon her shoulders. Refinement had become a more essential part of her. There were moments when Jerningham could scarcely believe her to be the same girl.

"You've changed a good deal, Nanno," he said, as she set the things in front of him.

"D'you think so? I suppose I have"—and then, in a sudden burst of impulse, she exclaimed, "Oh, Mr. Jerningham, it is strange to see you!" She said it in a low voice, but he felt the strain that lay behind it. He almost imagined that he traced a note of pleasure in her words. Home-sickness, he thought, it might probably be. He was, no doubt, a link, slender enough in all conscience yet, nevertheless, a link between her and the little farm up the brambled lane that she had left behind. She was glad to see him for that reason; and when the brambled lane and the old five-barred gate rose up in the focus of his mind's eye, he felt a deep and earnest sympathy for her. She was lonely—of course she was. For that matter, so was he sometimes; but a man does not count in these affairs. When she had said that—"Oh, Mr. Jerningham, it is strange to see you!"—he made up his mind that he

would contribute some effort to save the solitary condition of her life.

"Strange?" he said. "Yes, isn't it? How long have you been here?"

"A little over six months."

"As long as that?"

She nodded her head.

"And do you live here—on the premises I mean?"

"I do not."

"Where do you live, then?"

She told him at once, giving the number and the name of the street without any hesitation. To him, who knew nothing of Mr. Mossop, and to her, who was unconscious of her readiness to answer his question, this fact implied nothing; yet it was, nevertheless, indicative of the confidence which she placed in him. As he had treated her in Ireland so, she knew instinctively, he would treat her here. It would be, all through, his way of treating women, as also would those that Mr. Mossop had adopted remain his.

"And what do you do with yourself?" Jerningham asked, with growing interest.

"I can't wait now," she replied. She saw the cold eye of the superintendent watching her from the other side of the room, and knew that any slight indiscretion on her part would reach the ears of Mr. Mossop. "I must not talk any longer—I'll come back again." Then she moved away to make up a bill at another table.

Jerningham dallied over his tea. It was a meal of which he seldom partook, yet, for the sake of being able to say a few more words to Nanno, he ordered another supply of bread and butter, making desperate pretense to eat it.

There was something in the existence of this girl in

London that seemed to echo with his own. He drew thumb-nail sketches of her in his mind's eye, little impressionist pictures of her in the evening, sitting in her room by herself. That was a state of affairs that frequently existed with him. He felt sorry for her, as sometimes, when he was in the mood, he felt sorry for himself. Why, particularly, he should feel sorry for Nanno, he could not explain. There were hundreds of other girls in similar positions in life, hundreds of other girls who did their nine hours' work in the day, and then folded cold and untouched hands before them as the evening drew in. He was not drawn out of his way to feel sympathy for them. With Nanno, evidently, it was different. He was at least candid with himself, and admitted that she was attractive to him because she was Irish—because he had known her first in Ireland—had seen her under the conditions with which she was brought up. All these other girls were nonentities. He knew nothing about them. His lack of interest in them compelled him to imagine nothing. When he thought of Nanno, he imagined a host of things. He saw her in the cornfield; he pictured her driving home the cows. She stood out strikingly in his mind at the holy well, making her rounds and counting her beads. What girl was there in London, drudging in a tea-shop, who had such faith in the back of her heart as Nanno? Had any of them any faith at all?

He was perfectly aware why Nanno was interesting to him. It had been with her, as though he had watched her course from infancy, yet no one, it must be admitted, knew so little about her as Jerningham; and that again, when once he realized it, goaded him to know more. He did not study the lives and developments of people as a rule; with Nanno, he fancied he had begun to do so.

As he waited for her to come and make up his account, he determined in his mind to see more of her, to understand better the type of life that she had led and, if possible, to make it easier for her.

At last she came to his beckoning, and he asked her for his bill, watching her face as she calculated with the figures.

"Nanno," he said, as she laid the slip of paper in front of him, "I'm not going to be done out of my talk with you."

She smiled brightly. It is with this type of assertion of a man's authority and determination that a woman is won. The mailed fist or the tender ballade may find their answer in the obedient eyes and the soulful sigh; but it is the gentle sweeping up into the saddle-bow and the strong arm gripping the yielding waist that carries off more women in a whirlwind towards that horizon where the sun can never set.

"I came here, you know," he went on, "with the intention of having a talk. Mrs. Hilton told me where you came from."

"You asked her?" Nanno's eyes opened.

"Of course I did."

"And she told you?"

"Of course she did. Now, look here—to-morrow's Saturday. I suppose you've got a half day off?"

She nodded her head.

"Well, then—do you know your way down to the Temple?"

She said she did not. She had never, in fact, heard of it before. He told her then what 'bus to take that would bring her in the direction, advising her after that to ask her way to Plowden Buildings.

"Come down at about half-past three," he concluded,

"and we'll go back over old times. Who'd ever think it was as much as two years ago!"

For a moment she looked at him questioningly.

"I don't think it's right that I should," she said hesitatingly.

"Right?" He looked at her in astonishment. "Why shouldn't you? Do you remember driving in on the car with me to Anesk—that evening that I was going?"

"Yes—I remember," she replied.

"Well?"

The consideration of its not being absolutely the correct form of etiquette had not occurred to him; but it was by no means a point of etiquette that rose up before her. She trusted him—implicitly. There was, in fact, no other man she had ever met in whom she could place so much confidence. But that was not in question. What right had she to go to any man's rooms? Father Mehan's warning had left an impression in the recesses of her mind which she could not obliterate.

"Men come into women's lives, and women into men's," he had said, or to that effect; "and some were made, and some were spoiled."

Jerningham could not make her life. That, she knew only too well, was made already. But why should he spoil it? Was it always to be that she should have no companionship? Was she, for the rest of her life, to make for loneliness and shun friendship, because she was joined to a man whose morality was a wreck and whose affection for her did not exist? She did not realize all that the answering of this question meant. The flood comes in the tide of affairs moral and beneficial, and it is a mighty small-looking stream as men and women hesitate to look at it. They stand on the brink and ask themselves just the same sort of questions as Nanno was then asking

herself. Is it the time to launch or to refrain from launching? And the stream hums merrily by. In a few moments the waters will be placid and smooth and uneventful again. The opportunity for action or for answering will be gone. They wonder if that playful seething on the surface of the stream can really be the signs of a flood; but it is not at one's feet that the current runs strongest. Farther down the stream it is racing in a mad frenzy. There are whirlpools, cataracts, torrents, farther down; but, standing there, it is hard to see the foam they make or hear their voices that roar. And so, perhaps, the affairs are taken at the flood, or they are discarded; but it is only when the soul that takes them has been carried far down upon the water, that it realizes whether the tide be for good or evil.

This is the eternal question with mankind; this was the question then with Nanno. Was the tide of seeming happiness that was setting in upon the loneliness of her affairs, one for good or for evil?

"Well?" Jerningham repeated, his voice breaking in on the wondering of her thoughts. "How about that evening? Look here, you're not going to be a foolish girl and let yourself be worried by conventionalities? Do you know many people? Have you got many friends here in London?"

She framed a wistful negation with her lips.

"Well, then, you come down to Plowden Buildings to-morrow afternoon, and I'll give you a far better tea than you've just given me. What sort of cake do you like?"

She could not but laugh—he made so light of the whole thing.

"Ah!" he said, seeing her amusement—"I take that laugh as an answer—you'll come."

CHAPTER VII.

EXCEPT those parts which have latterly been rebuilt, the courts of the Middle Temple are singularly similar in appearance. All have their wooden flights of stairs that creak and groan as you mount them to your destination. In each building there is that atmosphere of musty recollections, that subtle sensation of bygone days. The caged gas-jet that flickers dimly and casts a cheerless light on each landing, is in keeping with everything—most of all with the unpromising milk cans that stand on the window-sill outside each door.

The Benchers are not concerned with the approach to your residential quarters. Your name is painted in black letters on the jamb of the main entrance; painted again on the lintel of your own door. In almost every case it is a double door, the outside being of thick, stout oak, covered with a layer of pale green paint, the inner of the same timber, bearing a knocker of a metal and antiquity which your pocket happens to afford. Or, perhaps, there is no knocker at all.

Nearly all the oak in the Temple—the paneling of the rooms, the lintels of the doors and the doors themselves—is covered with that same green paint. When you think of it as oak, you are apt to call it vandalism—unless you happen to be an admirer of Louis XV, when the fate of antique oak does not worry you. But in time you get accustomed to it; grow, in fact, to think of it as part of

the whole scheme. There is no doubt that the black letters of your name show up well on that green paint.

But it is not only the interiors of the buildings themselves which make the atmosphere that surrounds the Temple. It is to be felt outside in the courts as well. That narrow passage—Middle Temple Lane—with its numerous bypaths and alleys, its houses on either side that almost reach over and touch each other; those courts into which the alleys lead—Pump Court, Fig Tree Court—paved with the slabs of grave-like stones that seem to be memorial to the steps that have fallen upon them in the years of long ago—all these combine to breathe a silent atmosphere of the lives of men who have written their names in water, ink, or their own heart's blood, and gone their way into the great unknown.

There are the very graves, too, of some of those who peopled the Temple in that Past which can never fail to be romantic. Most of them who are known to us still, have written their names in ink or their own heart's blood, perhaps—if such writing could ever be traced—and the men who live in their rooms to-day yet strive to keep in touch with them. They collect the earlier editions of their books and strain their sight over the musty, printed characters. The middle Temple breeds a love of books—old books—first editions. It will not satisfy a man in Plowden Buildings or Essex Court to possess those new illustrated copies of "The Vicar of Wakefield." He must have his dirty "dumpy twelves" with the old-fashioned s's and faded brown pages that were once white, once handled, once caressed, perhaps, by the author himself.

The middle Temple will never lose that odor of the dim and half-forgotten past. It clings about its buildings as the aromatic perfume clings about the pot of scented rose-leaves that defy all dust and dare decay. The sim-

ple row of trees in Essex Court, they have looked on at life in the Temple for some few years, but they are quite silent about it, whispering only amongst themselves in winter; sighing, perhaps, in summer. And Fig Tree Court and Pump Court—it matters little that the pump has been appropriated for the use of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and that the fig tree no longer has existence—it is quite sufficient that they still bear their names to suggest the history that surrounds them.

And it is about the interiors, no less than in the courtyards themselves, that the sense of mystery and romance still clings to this part of old London. The rooms are paneled with that painted woodwork, sometimes to the edge of their low ceilings. They almost compel the choice of furniture that is mostly to be found in them—old oak dressers, Queen Anne bureaus, and brass ornaments. It is a strange fact that nearly all residents of the Temple—journalists, barristers, all classes, conditions, and opposites of mankind—invariably—unconsciously, it sometimes seems—submit to the same scheme of furnishing their quarters. Old prints adorn the walls; old books lie on the bookshelves. It would appear to be an unwritten sentiment that you may not modernize or denationalize the Temple with the furniture that you fill in your rooms. To do so would be ignorant, bad taste—sacrilege.

Some men, perhaps, you will find there—unprepossessing-looking men, with untutored voices and features that betray no inner refinement of intellect—who can set you right when you misquote the English classics of the last four centuries. They can tell you the genuine from the false in prints, pewter, brass, and what-not. The spell of the Temple is cast over them. In their own chambers you are compelled to submit yourself beneath them.

You have only to turn aside from Fleet Street and pass

down Middle Temple Lane, to feel in one moment, in the stillness that swiftly wraps you round, the subtle yet almost pregnant existence of your contact with the Past. The porter who sits in his little room under the archway, he is merely an ordinary cockney who, no doubt, takes his racing tips from the evening papers; but you cannot connect him with anything so cheaply modern or mundane. The barristers and their clerks, the law students and their women, they are all invested with that selfsame spell. They have chambers in the Temple—go and see them; go and talk to them in their surroundings, and you will find that in some unaccountable way they are different from the rest.

There is a general superstition that only barristers and law students occupy rooms in the Temple. But this is not the case. The Temple contains all sorts and conditions of men who have been admitted when that noble body of Benchers found themselves short of rents; and, once having entered, they have quietly remained. That only Benchers may drive into the Temple with a lady after a certain hour at night is a law that is inviolable; but that barristers should be the only inhabitants of chambers—that may be broken by necessity.

You will see the names on many lintels of men in all phases and fortunes of life and, were you to look upon the lintel of one of the doors in Plowden Buildings—the caged gas-jet illumines the letters, otherwise at night they would be undecipherable—you would find the name written, P. H. Jerningham.

That is all. Nothing to describe who P. H. Jerningham is; yet, when once she had found it on that next Saturday afternoon, Nanno was satisfied with the brevity of its sign.

The outer door was open, the inner closed. She stood

hesitatingly for a moment, her hand grasping the brass knocker, which represented a nude lady of sorts caressing her modesty. Jerningham had found it in a dirty furniture-shop in the Waterloo Bridge Road.

Even then, at that moment, doubts entered her mind. She had not struck the knocker. He did not know she was there. The indescribable prescience that she had always possessed in the matter of her own destiny, was haunting her with the monotonous persistence of a tolling bell. It was not too late to turn back. On the other hand, what was it really that she feared? This man whom she was going to see, what interest had he in her beyond that curiosity which one human being in one sphere of life feels for another? She herself was curious to see the conditions with which he lived. Anticipation burned in her to know what it was like on the other side of that door. But was it curiosity alone that had brought her there?

She thought over what she would do if she turned back then. She would get on to a 'bus in Fleet Street. The 'bus would be cold—cheerless—uncomfortable. She would return home, and there would be no fire in the sitting-room, unless she paid for it. There would be no one there to talk to her; no one to welcome her when she returned. On the other hand, beyond that door was everything that would make the rest of the afternoon pass more enjoyably than any day which she had yet spent in London.

Her hand raised the knocker. She paused. If she went to see Mr. Jerningham now, might it not mean her coming to see him again? Once more she let the knocker down gently, making no noise. And all these thoughts chased each other through her mind, as shadows of a passing show are swept across a screen. Three minutes had scarcely passed since, with an eager hand, she had first

grasped the little brass figure; yet in that time she had been warring against the dictates of her own destiny.

The fight was nearly over. Her mind was coming slowly to the decision that it would be unwise; but the entire foundation of that decision was one that she would not express, even with her most innermost thoughts. After all, what right had she to admit that Jerningham, as a man, had appealed to her from the first time that she had met him? She believed herself to be absolutely nothing—a cipher in the consideration of his affairs. His social standing was immeasurably above hers—his intellect, his education, his breeding, they were all incomparable with those qualifications which she knew to be her own. If she did admit in vague hypothesis that, as a man, he might be her ideal, how would that affect matters? How would it alter the scale one way or another? She would never be anything more than a farmer's daughter, an attendant in a restaurant, to him. But she did not admit it. She would not admit it. For another moment she stood there, her eyes closed, refusing to admit it.

Then decision came to her. She turned slowly away. It was a cruel renunciation. Her heart was crying in bitterness at the hardness of the compulsion. She knew then that life had to be fought by inches, not lived in oblivion through unlimited space and time.

Her foot was on the first wooden step that led down to the main entrance; her head was still half turned in the direction of the open outer door, when she heard footsteps on the other side and, swiftly turning, she tried to hurry down the remaining steps, making as little noise as possible.

It was too late. Jerningham had come out on to the landing. He had heard her departing footsteps, and was looking over the handrail from above.

"What's the meaning of this?" he called out.

She stopped. She had tried to get away—honestly tried—but her heart was beating with delight that she had been discovered.

"I'm just afther thinkin' that it would be better if I didn't come," she replied, looking up.

He smiled down at her.

"Do you imagine I'm going to allow that?" he asked, and he began to descend the stairs. "When I've bought the most wonderful thing in cakes you've ever seen and have been sitting watching a kettle that refuses to boil until it has mighty good reason to?" He reached her side and took her arm with gentle authority.

"Be so good," he said, "as to mount these stairs in front of me," and, setting her before him, he followed her up into the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was perfectly true that Jerningham had been sitting over the fire watching the kettle, but he had also been wondering about Nanno. He speculated with himself how she would be dressed. Sometimes, when in his mind's eye he saw the impression of a girl gaudily arrayed, having put on her best to honor him and the occasion, he shuddered. In her ignorance, he fancied that she might dress like that, and the possibilities of her being seen by men on the other landings made him wonder whether he had been wise in asking her there. Of course it would not be her fault; he could not for a moment blame her for it. But then, when he had seen her, his surprise had been far greater than his relief.

His sole impression was that she was quietly dressed, neatly dressed. Of what material her frock was made, he could not possibly have said; whether it was black or whether it was dark blue, he would have been equally in doubt. He only knew that he was more than satisfied; in fact, so far as such things did appeal to him, he was pleased.

That refinement which had always found evidence in her face had, since she had come to London, shown itself in various other little ways. Once it had found opportunity, the strain of her father was obliterating the coarser instincts that she inherited from her mother. Bridget had always thought that in finer suroundings her daughter

would develop into a fine woman. Had she seen her then, she would have realized the truth of her expectations.

For some little time after she had seated herself in the one comfortable armchair that he placed for her, Jerningham could only sit and watch Nanno's face in admiring satisfaction. There was no lady at that moment he could have named—no matter what social position she might have held—whom he would have preferred in Nanno's place. He felt perfectly at his ease with her. There was just a touch of that spirit of the eventful which added zest to the whole thing; and, leaning back in his chair, with his eyes still on her, he took a deep breath with involuntary content.

"Now we're going to have a tea," he said, "that'll knock that one you gave me into a cocked hat."

She could not prevent herself from laughing. She knew that, though she had been thwarted in her design, she was intensely happy.

"Won't you take off your hat?" he went on. "You'll be more comfortable."

"I'd rather not, if ye don't mind," she said.

He closed his eyes to the sound of gentle obedience in her voice. If he didn't mind! What other woman would have dreamed of adding that?

"Very well, then—come along—we're going to make some toast." He crossed to the gate-legged table in the center of the room and commenced cutting slices from a loaf of bread. She watched all his actions with a smile on her face.

"Shure, you're cutting it very thick!" she exclaimed at last, when she saw the tremendous slices that fell before the knife.

"And ought it to be thinner?" He looked round.

She crossed to the table, holding out her hand for the

knife. He gave it to her and, with skilful manipulation, she cut three more pieces where he would have cut one.

"That's neat enough," he said.

"I often make toast for myself at home," she explained.

"At home? Where? In Ireland?"

"No—the Fulham Road."

"So you call that home now—eh?"

"I do."

The moment that Ireland had been mentioned, her voice had lost the lightness of its tone. The word alone would have brought back the thought of all her sufferings; and then, also, she was wondering whether he knew. As soon as an opportunity occurred, she asked him whether he had been back again since to Rathmore.

"If I had," he replied, "do you think I wouldn't have come to see you?"

"And you haven't heard anything from Rathmore since?"

"Not a word."

Without being able to control it, a sigh of relief escaped from her. Then he knew nothing about her. It had vaguely entered her mind that if he were told that she had left her husband, he would refuse to speak to her again and, until that moment, she had never been so happy before in her life. Can it be wondered at, then, that her sigh was of relief?

"Is it the way you mean to toast it on the knife?" she asked, leaving the subject of Ireland as soon as she possibly could, "or have you got a proper fork?"

He had a proper fork. He fetched it for her and stood by while she secured a piece of bread upon the prongs. Then she carried it to the fire, kneeling down before the fender. Still he watched her. The back of her neck was like a child's. For a moment his eyes seemed hypnotized to

it. At last he came back to earth and Plowden Buildings.

"Look here," he exclaimed, striding forward, "give me the fork—you'll burn your face."

She looked up. "I don't mind the fire," she said.

"P'r'aps not—and neither do I. Come along, give me the fork."

He took it from her as she held it up, and continued with the toasting himself, his eyes lost in a contemplation of the fire, while she filled the teapot.

"You're very quiet suddenly," she said, when, after taking up the third piece of bread to toast, he still maintained silence.

He looked round and smiled.

"Sorry—don't think I was forgetting about you. I wasn't. When you've lived by yourself for a time, you'll find you'll get into it, too. Just a trick, habit—that's all."

"Do you feel lonely sometimes, then?" she asked.

He frowned at the fire.

"Only when any one comes up here—feel a bit lonely then. You see, I know they've got to go some time or other, and then I *shall* be alone. When I am by myself, then there's no one to go, so that I can't be any worse off. Quite silly, of course."

"Would you like me to go now?"

Jerningham stood up quickly from the fire.

"You mustn't misunderstand me like that," he said. "I'm enjoying myself immensely. Is the tea ready?"

She nodded her head.

He drew the one arm-chair up close to the fire for her and waited until she had seated herself.

"Now for the best cup of tea," he began.

She interrupted quaintly, with a smile. "Is your tea the best?"

"Always," he said; then they laughed.

There is a type of pleasure, of happiness, in this world that is beyond comprehension. It will not admit of extremes, though it be pregnant with possibilities. No relaxation follows after it; it is simple to a degree. Such a type is that when the natures of a man and a woman first find mutual interest in each other's society. At that period and so long as it lasts, before avowals are made or passions declared, when there are no illusions to be spoiled or hopes to be crushed, they too, are experiencing a state of almost perfect happiness. In subtle hiding behind it all, as the sense of danger that lurks in the truest forms of sport, there lies the knowledge that one day the moment will come when the train will be burned out, the magazine of powder reached, and the entire condition of things be altered. It is this tremble of anticipation—this tentative playing with a quivering fire—that adds a zest, or rather is the gist of pleasure itself in this negative state of happiness. Negative it must be, for when the woman has looks and the man the blood of youth, a burning there will follow, without doubt. In the whole range of chemical science there are no two substances, such as these, so highly inflammable, so bound when brought in contact to coalesce.

In such a state of happy contentment Jerningham found himself that afternoon. At the time, he did not wish it to go further. It did not enter into his consideration that Nanno was a woman to be desired. He did not see that a hundred men in his place—rushing to the conclusion that, in her consent of coming to their rooms, she had tacitly consented to other things—would find the urgent temptation of pressing their advantage, even if they did not give way to it. None of these things occurred to him. He merely found her a companion—different, perhaps, in her companionship from men but,

nevertheless, a companion with whom the hours passed like minutes.

The men who came up to his rooms helped themselves to what he had. Nanno had to be helped, to be waited on. The whole experience took him out of himself—a circumstances for which any one in this world may be thankful.

The fact that she was a waitress in a restaurant did not touch him. Even when she was telling him of her experiences, he scarcely thought of her as that.

Her ignorance of life in London he found fascinating. She had never heard of the Stock Exchange; and then, what was monotonous routine to him, became suddnly interesting as he explained to her the wheels that worked within wheels, the struggle that was forever seething in the heart of the City.

Whenever she did not understand, she asked curious, childish questions that sometimes made him laugh, sometimes compelled him to lean back in his chair and watch her face with wonder.

But, beside all this, she had uncommon, unexpected views of life. Occasionally in Ireland, she had given them expression. He remembered that he had once remarked upon them to her. Now, because, no doubt, of all she had suffered, they were more frequent. At unlooked-for moments she expressed thoughts that amazed him; the expression of them was simple in the extreme. What little reading she had done since she came to London, would not be calculated to materially raise the standard of her ideas or yield her a greater facility of speech: her education had never been of that high order which elevates the plebeian mind to a contemplation of higher things; it was simply that grasp of her own outlook on life—that instinct of her

own fate—which brought involuntarily, unconsciously, to her lips the words she said.

There were moments when—commonplace though he thought her circumstances to be—he knew that he did not understand her; realized that, as a complexity of character, she was utterly beyond him. But all this only added to her interest.

"I believe you're a pessimist," he said, when tea was finished and she had been talking generally about the effort that so many were compelled to make to keep up that vague, indescribable appearance of respectability.

"An' what's that?" she asked.

"A person who takes the rough road rather than the smooth, and then offers the belief that life is entirely paved with uncut stones."

"I know what you mean," she replied; "but you say it as if 'twas the way the person took the rough road on purpose."

"So they do."

"They do not—not always. Shure, it isn't always there's a cross-road at all. There are some people that have one road the whole time, and there be finger-posts pointing the way, keeping on telling them the way, though there's no chanst for them to go any other way. An' they've got to keep walking up hill and down dale till they're stopped in a wood that's always lonely and black, and then a big, gray figure comes out of the trees——"

"Death?"

"Death."

"Those whom the gods love—die young, eh?"

"I don't know what you mean by—the gods—but somebody's lovin' ye if ye do die young."

"Nanno!"

"What?"

"Why do you say these things?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Jerningham—'tis the way with me sometimes. Ye was talking so serious, and then it seems that's what it all comes to in the end."

"Do you often think these things?"

"Not often—no—I'm very happy sometimes—and then sometimes it seems as though bein' happy was only a kind o' piece o' colored glass, that makes everything look different. Then ye get tired of holding it up in front o' yeer eyes, and when ye put it down it's like that."

"Like what?"

"Like what I said."

"And was the colored glass down all this afternoon?"

"It was not."

"You've been happy, then?"

"I have——" she paused. "Oh! I haven't been so happy for a long, long time."

CHAPTER IX.

NANNO lived on the remembrance of that afternoon for a considerable length of time. In the uneventful course of her existence it stood out from other days as one set apart, hallowed by memory of its pleasantness. On a calendar that hung in her bedroom, she marked the date with a ring of pencil and, whenever it caught her eye, she fell into a reverie, reviewing it in all its details with a lingering pleasure. To her it had meant a great deal. From the time she had come to London her thankfulness had all been for negative conditions—an absence of torment, an abatement of suffering. Now she felt grateful for the positive pleasure of that one afternoon's companionship. It did not seem that there could be anything left to ask for; but just that she might sometimes see Jerningham and talk with him, as she had done then. Her desires had not one touch of sensuality. In the simplicity of her nature, she did not consider what his might be, or what they might become. He had not made love to her as her husband had done; he had not treated her after the manner of Mr. Mossop. She could not believe that in his nature he was a man just such as they were. Everything he did and said pointed to his being so utterly different. If she were going to appeal to him in that, the coarser way of life, it would have shown in the beginning; it would have made itself evident in Ireland, and she would have shunned him from the first. Now she knew that it was not so; could never be so. He was her friend and, if

ever a woman needed a friend on whom to lean for the support of advice and companionship, it was she. Never through her life, had she possessed the magic lamp of friendship until now; and it was not her intention to lose it by presuming things that were out of the question.

Father Mehan's warning to her had, no doubt, been instinct with truth. The world was full of men who would not stand by and see a young girl alone without having something to say to her existence. Belonging to such a type, was Mr. Mossop. The women who stood alone were his prey. He pounced upon them at once. But Jerningham was different. He had often seen her—five times in all—yet he had never once shown one sign of desire for her other than as a friend. Could she have been more at his mercy than she had been that Saturday afternoon, alone with him in his rooms? Yet he had not taken advantage of it. He had made the whole position seem one of ordinary circumstance, to such an extent that she would never again feel any compunction in going to see him.

On the Friday following that Saturday afternoon, Miss Shand had come to see her when the work of the day was over. Maynard's closed at seven o'clock in the evening and, when the last customer had departed, the two girls hurried out of the building from the door which was reserved for the entrance and exit of the much-despised commercial traveler. A 'bus took them to the Fulham Road; a cold and draughty 'bus, with muddied floor and every available space inside plastered with unctuous advertisements. On a wintry evening, when the conductor's feet are cold, and the rain is dripping from the shelter on to his shoulder, a 'bus is not the most cheerful vehicle in the world. But these two took no heed of the conductor as he stamped impatiently to keep his feet warm, or of the testy

old gentleman with a muffler across his mouth, who coughed and complained of a lack of room at regular intervals. There is a spirit of cheerfulness that overlooks these little details of life and Nanno, possessed of it to the full, infused it into the mind of her companion.

A meal that she had ordered to be set in readiness by Mrs. Hudson was awaiting them when they went into the sitting-room; a fire was crackling brightly in the hearth. They both emitted exclamations of delight, and hurried to the fireplace to warm themselves.

"Is all this on account of me, dear?" asked Miss Shand.

Nanno said "Um" in a comprehensive way. The other put her arm round her waist.

"You're going to tell me this evening, aren't you?" she said.

Nanno looked quickly at her.

"Tell you what?" she asked.

"Who the fellow was that came in that day to see you—a week ago to-day—aren't you?"

"I didn't say I would."

"No—but you remember, dear, I asked you."

This did not seem to Nanno a sufficient reason for her to speak to Miss Shand about Jerningham. She did not say so, but then, she said nothing. Instead, she took her companion by the arm and led her into the bedroom.

"Aren't you dying to take your hat off?" she said, when they got inside. To those who had known her in Ireland it would have been a very noticeable fact that her speech was fast losing its nationality. She still had an evident inclination to a brogue—that could never be entirely eradicated—but the method of forming her sentences she had vastly altered, as it were keeping pace with the complete change of her environments.

Miss Shand replied to her question with action. The

long hat-pins were extracted, the hat thrown on to the bed and, finally, the pins employed before the glass to raise her hair from her forehead, where the hat had crushed it down. When this operation was finished, she turned and looked round the room.

There were fresh pictures on the walls since she had been there last; amongst them was the gaudy-colored print of the Sacred Heart that hung over Nanno's bed.

"Whatever's that, dear?" she asked, pointing to it.

"A picture of the Sacred Heart."

The answer conveyed nothing to Miss Shand, beyond the fact that it had some religious meaning. That the heart itself of any one, however sacred, could mean anything to anybody in this prosaic world was outside the pale of her comprehension.

"Fancy your being a Roman Catholic!" she said, as she turned away. "Isn't it funny?"

"Why funny?" asked Nanno.

"I don't know—it seems strange any one believing in those sort of things. I couldn't."

Nanno made no reply. She remembered her conversation with Jerningham in Ireland on the second occasion when they had met. He had said he could not believe in saints, but in her heart she had known that that was because he had not been taught the faith which she possessed. She greatly believed that faith was a teachable commodity. But this girl, she felt, would be incapable, unreceptive, of instruction. She did not, could not blame her for it; but to discuss it with her as she had done with Jerningham seemed utterly useless. She said nothing.

"Do you say prayers to that?" persisted Miss Shand lightly. She extracted a hairpin from her hair as she asked the question, and commenced to clean her nails.

"Shure, we only pray to God," Nanno replied simply,

"but through the power of many intercessions and appeals. That's one of them."

"How funny!" Miss Shand repeated, as she replaced the hairpin. "Are you ready? I'm as hungry as a cat."

For the first few moments of the meal, Nanno felt in no mood for conversation. Her companion's utter disregard for sacred things had offended the sensitive side of her nature which clung fast to her faith; she felt out of sympathy with her. She put it aside, however, and soon they were laughing and talking again as they had been when coming back in the 'bus. The conversation was mostly of inconsequent things—people whom they had both happened to observe in the restaurant, the vagaries of the lady superintendent, the jealousies and petty spites amongst the other girls. It would have interested no one but themselves.

At last, when Nanno's good spirts had wholly returned, Miss Shand cautiously reverted to the subject that she had broached when they first came in.

"I believe I've seen that friend of yours before," she said suggestively.

Nanno looked up impulsively from her plate.

"Where?" she asked.

"Well, you know I told you that before I came to Maynard's I was playing in an orchestra at a restaurant in the Strand—you do remember, don't you, dear?"

Nanno nodded an affirmative.

"Well, I believe I saw him having tea there one afternoon."

She convinced herself, as she said it, that this was the truth; but then, Jerningham was not an uncommon type, and out of the numberless men whom she had seen in this particular restaurant, there could not have failed to be many who would bear a slight resemblance to him. She

might have seen him—on that she based her assertion, and with that she endeavored to convice herself.

"How long ago was that?" Nanno asked, with interest.

"Oh!—let me see—I've been in Maynard's for six months. It must have been just before then."

"About seven months ago?"

"Yes—that's about it. He's very handsome, isn't he?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know!" Miss Shand laughed sententiously. "Oh, get along! You know he is—and such a gentleman, too—what I mean you'd almost think he was in society—you know what I mean, dear."

"So he is—he is a gentleman."

The words had slipped from Nanno's lips before she could stop them. She cried in her heart in vain to get them back; a fruitless combat against windmills. The insinuation that he was not a gentleman, the subtle insult of supposing that, from his looks, he might even be in society, when she knew that he was, had seen him in its midst herself, was more than she could withstand. He might be in Society! And that word—society—meant a great deal to her. She moved amongst a class of people who used it to describe refinement, wealth, romance—all, in fact, that was the unattainable to them.

Miss Shand was delighted with the information. It corroborated what she had already thought herself, and served the more to increase her curiosity and interest.

"D'you know, I guessed as much," she said immediately, assuming not to have noticed Nanno's evident regret for her reply. "He seems different to other men—men like Mr. Mossop, for instance—doesn't he, dear?"

Nanno admitted that there was a difference between him and that unctuous employer of Maynard's stores.

"I suppose you've known him quite a long time?" Miss Shand went on craftily.

"A little more than two years," Nanno replied proudly.

Her companion looked at her enviously, yet with undisguised admiration.

"Is he serious, d'you think?" she asked. "Seems a long time, doesn't it?"

Nanno opened her eyes.

"What do you mean by serious?" she asked.

"Well, when's he going to marry you? Two years is a long time—isn't it?"

Nanno leaned on the table and looked with some sort of amazement into Miss Shand's face.

"Marry me?" she repeated. "Me? When's he going to marry me? Why, he's a gentleman—in society."

"Well—I don't mind that. Gentlemen in society marry actresses sometimes. It isn't because a man's a gentleman that he can have his time with a girl—a good girl like you are, too—for two years, and not marry her decently. One woman's the same as another, as far as that goes. A woman's virtue's not for sale—at least, that's what I say—it's only when her virtue's gone that you can buy from a woman."

Nanno could scarcely contain her surprise. For the first few words of what she said, she could not believe that Miss Shand was speaking seriously. Such thoughts as these were utterly foreign to her. It was as though she had been shown an unexpected glimpse into the manners and customs of a life that was not her own. How anyone could think such things of Mr. Jerningham, amazed her. Then, also, the suggestion of his marrying her seemed so completely preposterous, even putting aside the fact that she was married already.

"You don't know what you're talking about," she said

at last. "Shure, he's nothing more than a friend to me, and never will be anything more. You don't know what you're saying when you think he's a man like that."

It was Miss Shand's turn to be surprised. She knew that Nanno was telling the truth; but she could not understand how, after an acquaintance of two years, they were nothing more than friends. As far as Jerningham himself was concerned, she had her own opinion of his nature as a man. Her experience of those who considered themselves gentlemen, and whom, sometimes, she considerd to be gentlemen, too, had always proved that the one motive controlled them all; and it is hard to make a woman of some experience believe that there are many exceptions to the rule which her experience dictates to her.

"I'm sure I didn't mean to say anything unkind, dear," she said tactfully. "Of course, I'm sure I'm all wrong. But it does surprise me—fancy your only being friends! I thought it was something far more romantic!"

As though to place a climax on all that had been said, Mrs. Hudson, at that moment, opened the door and came into the room.

"There's a gentleman as wants to see you, miss," she said.

"A gentleman?"

"Mr. Jerningham, 'e calls 'isself."

Nanno's face flamed, and Miss Shand jumped with the agility of a woman's mind to her conclusion.

"Oh!—can't he come in, Mrs. Hudson?" she took it upon herself to say. "It's all right."

"Well, I'm sure I don't mind."

Nanno stood up from the table.

"No—he can't come in," she said. "I'll go out and see him."

Miss Shand laughed as Mrs. Hudson went away.

"I guessed he was more than a friend," she said somewhat spitefully.

This was an insinuation that Nanno could not bear. She hated to hear any one make it. He *was* only a friend! How could he be anything else, when she was a married woman? She would show Miss Shand that she was wrong.

"Mrs. Hudson!" she called out, going to the door, "ask Mr. Jerningham to come upstairs!"

CHAPTER X.

JERNINGHAM stood in the doorway, holding his hat in his hand.

"I guessed I was intruding," he said, "by the doubtful way in which the fat lady downstairs said I might come up." He looked particularly at Nanno. "I really only wanted to see you for a minute."

He came farther into the room, and then Nanno, nervous and timid as to what she should do, took his outstretched hand.

"This is Miss Shand," she said, turning towards her companion. "Mr. Jerningham."

Miss Shand effusively grasped his hand, ill concealing her eagerness to meet him.

"How do you do?" she said, and she smiled engagingly.

Jerningham, a little overwhelmed, murmured something inaudibly. He was not a man who could suffer being lionized with imperturbable ease. Nanno placed a chair for him and asked him to sit down.

"Were you in the middle of a meal?" he asked. "Don't let me stop you."

They both assured him that they had finished; Nanno with shy timidity, Miss Shand with confident assertion and admiring eyes.

"Is this a sort of gala night, then?" he asked. "Somebody's birthday, or something like that?"

Nanno smiled. "Miss Shand comes in and plays the violin for me sometimes," she explained—"she plays beau-

tifully, and she leads the orchestra at Maynard's." These last two statements she made with generous impulse, but Miss Shand vigorously denied them: vigorously, because it called more attention to an accomplishment which she possessed in advantage of her companion.

If this man Jerningham were only a friend of Nanno's, as platonic as Nanno would have suggested him to be, there seemed to her no reason why she should not endeavor to pave her own path towards his favor. There had been a sufficient number of examples in her life to prove to her that she was attractive to men. Looking at her own reflection in a glass, she would have called herself pretty; but her attraction to the other sex did not originate from that point of view. There was something animal in her features, something suggestive in her expression. When a man noticed her, it was because, in the way she was made, in the way she walked, in the way she dressed, and in the way she looked at him, he was carried to a thought of her body rather than of her mind. The world contains many such women; the stage is peopled with them.

And so she vigorously denied Nanno's praise of her, in the hope that she would be asked to play. Her hope was fulfilled. More out of a sense of politeness than any desire for music, Jerningham expressed a wish to hear her.

She rose from her seat at once, lest the request should not be repeated, but protested all the time, as she lifted her violin out from its case and despoiled it of its silk wrapping, that Nanno had grossly exaggerated her ability.

When once the instrument was under her chin and she began to tune the strings, she assumed a pose of caressing sensuousness; that same pose which Nanno had been attracted to when she had first seen her. On many men it had the same effect. She knew very well how she appeared. That pose had not been studied in a long

mirror without purpose. She gave the impression that, as she fondled her violin, so she would cling in passive passion to the man whom she would love.

Then she began to play, choosing a somewhat commonplace tune; one, also, that asked less for the need of an accompaniment. It moved slowly, seductively. She thrilled each note with a passionate tremolo, and, as she played, her eyes sought Jerningham's as though she were trying to speak. For the first few moments he watched her face, he saw her pose; then, when he became conscious of her eyes, he turned uncomfortably away.

But Nanno, whom she left unnoticed, never looked in any other direction. She was fascinated, as a snake fascinates its prey; fascinated by a loathing and a dread, a fear and a contempt. Once she glanced at Jerningham, a glance filled with trembling apprehension. He was not looking at Miss Shand, but in his face she thought she saw him caught within the web; struggling half-heartedly in the spirit to free himself, yet in the flesh quiescent, succumbed.

It was probably from the point of that moment that the thorn entered Nanno's side—that she first felt the prick of the goad in her flesh, galling her young blood, making her leap like a restive filly into the flood of life which forever swells on to the eddying whirlpools and the seething cataracts.

The bitter knowledge that, however low she stooped, however contemptible her methods were, Miss Shand was utterly within her rights when she set out to fascinate Jerningham—that was the pricking goad, and it galled incessantly. Nanno had not asked that he should be more than a friend to her. Her most vital senses had not till then been touched by any other desire of him. Now she knew that if Miss Shand, with her superior right—the

superior right of her freedom—were to win him, the friendship would break, as a bubble that escapes and is caught in its passage by a gust of wind.

Months might have gone by, had conditions remained as they were, and Nanno would still have believed herself to be contented with friendship. But now, brought to a crisis in a moment, she had come to know that she loved this quiet, simple man with his unselfish ways and his gentle consideration of her. She loved him for his strength, as she loved him for his almost childlike interests in little things. And still, even with that knowledge pressing through her blood, there was nothing of the sensual in her affection. The matter was almost entirely intellectual. She loved him with her mind, though it is not improbable that, had this realization come to her before her marriage with Jamesy, she might then have loved him passionately, too. But, compared with the instincts that were alive in her companion, her thoughts of Jerningham were as untainted as the air of the early morning that is swept up from the sea. She had been brought by wholesome jealousy to know that she wanted him for herself. It was a desire that she would not disclose. Above everything in her mind there rose the consideration of him, his happiness, his welfare. These were infinitely more dear to her than any pleasure of her own and, with a subtle instinct, as she watched her companion's face, she knew that they were safer in her hands than in the keeping of Miss Shand.

When the playing was finished, the performer laid her violin back in its case. Her hands were shaking as she wrapped the silk scarf around it—little beads of perspiration stood out upon her lip.

"Thank you very much, Miss Shand," Jerningham said, as she came back to the table. "I don't know a thing about music, but it sounded very nice."

He did not look at her while he spoke, though her eyes were strained to his.

"It's not up to much to play without an accompaniment." She turned to Nanno. "Sounds better with the orchestra—doesn't it, dear?"

"I think it does," Nanno replied.

There followed a slight pause between the three, then Jerningham rose to his feet.

"I have to be getting off," he said decisively. He saw no opportunity of Miss Shand's departure, and so hoped that Nanno might come downstairs with him to the door.

Miss Shand at once picked up her violin case.

"I must go too, dear," she said. "I said I couldn't stay for long—didn't I?"

Nanno looked for a moment from one to the other. The thought had leaped into her mind that there might be some understanding between them, but the half-concealed annoyance that passed through Jerningham's eyes dispelled the suspicion. Such a thought, by nature, was beneath her. On the whole, perhaps, she gave too much trust to the people whom she met; but now she was racked with jealousy. Her heart beat with it, her breath was quickened by it.

"Would you like to put on your hat, then?" she said.

Miss Shand readily assented, passing at once into the inner room.

The moment that they were left alone, Jerningham came to Nanno's side.

"I haven't said what I wanted to, yet," he asid quietly.

She looked up at him.

"What is it?"

"I have to go down to a place called Hitchin to-morrow afternoon, to see a client. Hitchin's a jolly little country place, stocked with quaint corners—not like your country,

places in Ireland—more civilized, you know. It's in Hertford, about an hour's journey outside London——"

"Well?" she said at last. He would have gone laboring on for some time longer, sensitive about coming to the point of what he wanted to say.

"I want to know if you'd like to come," he said, with sudden impulse. "The outing'll do you a heap of good, and you haven't seen any of the country in England yet—have you?"

"No—I haven't."

"Well—d'you think you'd like it? We'll try what sort of tea they'll give us down at Hitchin. You'd better come, you know. Of course, if you think——"

"'Tis the way I don't think anything at all—except that I'd like to come. I would indeed."

He patted her back in a friendly way.

"That's remarkably sensible," he said gaily. "Sticking up here in town, when there's the whole acreage of England open to you, will only lay you up. You want fathering, you know."

She laughed brightly, and then they made their arrangements for the morrow. At any other time, Nanno might have refused this offer, much as it appealed to her. But then, with jealousy knocking at her heart, she would have been inhuman had she not consented.

The next moment, Miss Shand came in from the other room.

"Which way are you going, Mr. Jerningham?" she asked.

"The City," he replied.

"Oh—then we shall be going together. I live up the Gray's Inn Road."

Nanno had anticipated this. She knew that it had been the intention of Miss Shand's departure and, when they

had gone, and the noise of the hall door closing below had reached her ears, she stood at the closed window and pictured them in her imagination in the street beneath. Jerningham had asked her to go with him the next day; but then, in the all-important present, Miss Shand had him to herself. A breath of hot wind seemed to fan her face. Yet still she stood at the window, irresolute. At last the inclination overcame her. She undid the bolt, and raised the window; then, leaning out, she looked up the street.

They were just turning the corner. Before they were out of sight, she saw Miss Shand look up into his face; in a breath of silence, she heard her laugh. So do voices sound in hell. The next moment, they had gone. She stood back again into the room, following them with her mind's eye.

"Oh!" she exclaimed involuntarily, as the picture became vivid; "it's wrong o' me—I know it's wrong!"

CHAPTER XI.

There was no little anticipation in Jerningham's mind as he walked away with Miss Shand that night. He did not understand women; he did not understand Miss Shand —but he knew, by no very subtle instinct, when the devil was at large. Without exactly understanding why, he had seen it in her eyes as she had played the violin—without reasoning the cause, he had heard it in her voice when she had announced that she too was coming home and that their ways lay in the same direction.

Her laugh—the laugh that Nanno had heard—had been one of flattery at some dry remark that he had made, not intended to be exactly humorous. And in that laugh, he heard and felt her abandonment. Then for some moments they had walked on in silence.

"Have you known Nanno Troy for long?" he asked presently.

"Only since she came to Maynard's. She's a dear little thing: I'm very fond of her."

Jerningham nodded approvingly. He did not follow her subtle discretion. He did not see the motive behind her remark, and accordingly it produced the effect she wished for. He thawed a little; he became more genial. In a few minutes they were laughing and talking with a greater ease.

"Where do *you* live?" she asked after a time.

"The Temple—Middle Temple—Plowden Buildings."

"Oh—you poor thing. Do you live by yourself then?"

"An inveterate bachelor."

"Oh?" There was a depth of insinuation in her voice. "Inveterate?" she added—"But you never know. I expect you find you can get along just as well that way though—eh?"

Jerningham laughed sharply at her audacity.

"Afraid I don't consider the question much either way," he answered.

By an unnoticeable degree, she brought her step closer to his, so that they touched as they walked. He thought it was by accident until it recurred again once or twice. Then he looked at her face.

"Are you going back home again now?" she asked.

"I am."

"All by yourself?"

"All by myself."

She looked up at him with a suggestive smile. "And you an inveterate bachelor—oh, don't tell me!"

"I am, I assure you. It's too late to turn into a theater; besides, I don't know that I'd care to go to one if I could."

"I didn't mean that—you know I didn't."

"Then what did you mean?"

"Do you mind if I take your arm? it's so slippy and muddy underfoot."

"Suppose we get a hansom—it is much too wet for walking. I can drive you back. It's more or less in my way."

"Oh—that 'ud be luscious—wouldn't it?"

Jerningham hailed a passing hansom, helped her in, asked her the address of her rooms and, telling the cabman where to drive, shut the doors upon them.

She sat as close to him as she could, her elbow pro-

truding across his arm, and for a moment he shut his eyes, listening to the conflict of his conscience with himself. On one side was urged the policy to take life as it came; as in a measure he had always taken it. On the other side he saw the sad, wistful eyes of Nanno, whom they had just left behind them. Involuntarily he made a comparison between this sensuous girl beside him and her. The man in him, the man himself, as God had made him, was revolted by the picture that it produced. Beside this piece of flotsam of London life, this girl who made her existence a trap for the weaker nature of men, Nanno stood apart as a fresh wild flower that rises out of a dust-heap: so a daffodil makes pollen out of that dust of pure gold and extracts it from the refuse of the earth. She was all that eliminated the best side of a man from the dross of his nature. She was a pure, undefiled child, with a majestic faith; whilst this girl here was nothing but the scum that finds its way to the surface, floating about, attracted to everything that comes near its course.

Why did he not desire to win Nanno, who was clean, white, fresh as God had sent her forth—Nanno, whose untouched mind would lift him above this occasional demand to take the fruit that drops with its sordid over-ripeness into the hand?

While these thoughts passed through his mind he answered Miss Shand with disinterested monosyllables. She could extract nothing from him because he was just at that crisis of a man's life when the lesser things of the world become insignificant before the great, illuminating power of some higher, more inspiring motive.

The hero is not by any means the perfect man. He has his sins—he has his feelings. The hero rather is the man who, passing through life, dealing honorably with all men and all women—even with the worst of them

—is at last lifted above the surface where all light matter lies; lifted above it by the great light of some nobler feeling—the unconquerable hope of being able to conquer with the right; lifted above a common desire to an unselfish fanaticism as Jerningham, in his comparison between Nanno and Miss Shand, was borne above the wish to take the life that came into the desire to win the life that was beyond him. Such a state as this is hero-ship; the moment when a human being, launching forth beyond that tide of earthly endeavor to reach the ultimate good, ascends above the needs of the flesh towards the striving of the spirit. All the world sets forth to climb that mountain of good intention; but it is only the hero who raises his head above the clouds and gains the light in the brilliant atmosphere beyond.

Unconsciously, Nanno had effected her first influence upon Jerningham; but the attitude that his mind had reached was because of her, rather than for her sake. Such a man, living the solitary life that he had lived, is not quick to see the state of mind into which he is drifting. He can realize the present and its immediate surroundings, but he is not sufficiently introspective to grasp the trend of circumstances and construe their meaning to himself. Jerningham was fully aware that Nanno had been the influence which had led him to the conquering of his senses; but he was not yet aware that he loved her. The moment when a man recognizes that a certain woman is essential to him, had not as yet illuminated his understanding. He put it all down to interest; he ascribed it to the belief that women can be the best as also they may be the worst influence in a man's life. In that moment, when he had determined to resist the opportunity that Miss Shand was subtly offering to him, he thought of Nanno as a personality infinitely beyond his reach, in-

finitely beyond the principles of his own conception of morality. And this state of mind, it needed only one spark of intimacy to set into the flame of an absorbing passion. For that his whole nature was unconsciously waiting.

The cab at last pulled up opposite the house where Miss Shand lived. Jerningham got out first, protecting the wheel, so that she should not soil her skirt. She waited while he paid the driver and then, as the man drove off, Jerningham turned and held out his hand.

"Good-night," he said.

She did not offer to take his hand. She looked up expectantly into his face.

"Won't you come in for a bit?" she asked.

"I don't think I'd better," he replied quietly.

She came closer to him, still looking up into his face. "Just for a little while—come along?"

"I don't think I'd better," he repeated stolidly.

"I suppose you think there'd be a lot of people in the house? There won't—we can be quite alone. Do come—I want you to." Her voice quivered on the last words.

He shook his head.

"I'm going back to the Temple," he said.

She looked at him eagerly.

"Well—take me," she suggested.

He stood back from her.

"Miss Shand," he said—"don't think I blame you in the least. Things of that sort scarcely enter my head. I suppose I've knocked about too much——But you're a friend of Nanno Troy's. It's probably in your hands to a certain extent what outlook she gets of life. At present she's absolutely untouched—and—there's no need to describe what you want with me now—I've told you blame doesn't enter my head—but if you spoiled Nanno

Troy's life you'd be committing the greatest sin you ever did in the whole of your existence."

All the time she watched his face; and when he had finished, she laughed with passionate disappointment. Her lip curled, defying the tears of her chagrin.

"Why, you love her yourself!" she exclaimed ironically. "You love her yourself, and she told me you were only a friend. I guessed she was talking out of the back of her neck!"

"I love her?" Jerningham repeated; "I think a great deal of her—but heavens! I've never been in love in my life. But don't you forget what I say. In a measure —Nanno Troy is in your hands. Good-night."

He turned away. She watched him as he walked up the muddy pavement into the Gray's Inn Road, but he did not look back, as she had half hoped that he would.

"I love her?" he kept repeating to himself. "I love her? I wonder what made her think that. She's a splendid character, of course—but——"

CHAPTER XII.

THE impulse upon which Nanno had accepted Jerningham's proposal that she should go with him into the country had its reaction. With subsequent consideration, she believed that she had done wrong. Knowing, as she did now, that she loved him, it seemed but a tempting of temptation to yield to the delight of having his companionship. Yet again and again the thought prompted itself —she was really nothing to him. Being with him might be the draining of a cup filled up to the brim with a bitter pleasure, yet so long as she took the draught in secret, who would it hurt but herself? There was no contingency which she could foresee, under whose influence she would expose her secret. Then, last of all, on this occasion at least, she had promised, and the high regard in which she held him forbade her from breaking it.

And so it was the next day that they met at the station, and left London by some early afternoon train.

"I've looked up the trains back," Jerningham told her, when they were seated in the empty first-class carriage, "and the last one leaves Hitchin at seven o'clock in the evening, so that we'll have to come by that whether we like it or not."

"But shure, that's quite late enough," she said.

"D'you think so? I don't. I wanted to give you dinner there. There's a fine old-fashioned inn in the High Street, about three hundred years old, with a regular coaching courtyard—that's where we'll have tea.

And I wanted to have dinner. Well, we can get that up in town."

She did not tell him then that she would go straight back home when they returned; but she made up her mind to it. It was good to be with him certainly; but she loved him—every moment that he spoke she loved him the more—and then, when she realized the unutterable hopelessness of it, it seemed to her self-torture that was unnecessary. If she could only feel his arms about her once, she thought—just once realize that he too could love her; then she believed that she could go from him forever and exist upon the remembrance of that moment for the rest of her life.

Jerningham watched her as, looking out of the windows at the leafless trees that flitted by like passing skeletons, she let these thoughts course through her mind. Miss Shand's words persistently recurred to him. They sounded in his memory like a distant prophecy, but because the moment of intimacy had not yet come, he could not really understand them. To love meant in a sense to desire and, as he looked at her, he could only think of the curious loneliness of her life, her untouched virtue and her majestic faith. The element of desire seemed almost sacrilege.

This state of mind, it will be admitted, could be no fitter preparation for the great illumination of the greatest passion in the world; the passion that must possess all—body and soul—yet is ready without thought to give life, if need be, in return.

"It's a pity it's not spring or summer time," Jerningham said at length, after a lapse of silence.

"Ah—what a pity!" she echoed feelingly. "The winter's an unkind time of the year. In Ireland, if any one goes away for the winter, they always ask who died when they come back."

"Are you afraid of death, Nanno?"

"I'm not then—not always. There are some ways that I could die quite happily. Shure, I could always die happily if I got Plenary Indulgence."

"That's entire forgiveness, isn't it?"

"It is."

"If a person obtains Plenary Indulgence, they go straight to heaven—don't they?"

"They do."

"Well, now, supposing a person was excommunicated from the Church—couldn't they get Plenary Indulgence when they were dying?"

"They could not—not if the Church had closed its doors against them." As she said this, the words of Father Mehan's warning echoed in her ears, and the fear of such a state of desolation chilled the blood in her. She closed her eyes involuntarily. Jerningham watched her, half-seeing what she felt.

"The thought of such a possibility frightens you—eh?" he said questioningly.

She looked out of the window.

"Couldn't we talk of something else?" she suggested.

He turned the conversation lightly into another channel.

So far they had had the carriage to themselves, but at the next station where they stopped, a smartly dressed woman and an immaculate-looking man got in. Seeing Nanno and Jerningham alone together, the man had hesitated when he approached the door.

"Oh, this'll do," the woman said petulantly, and they had entered the carriage, occupying two corners at the farther end.

"Well, thank goodness, that's over," she said, leaning back in her seat and lifting her veil on to her forehead.

"It was a tight job," said the man, "but I think we managed."

"Tight? Not a bit of it!"

"But look at the way she cried."

The woman looked at her companion with some pity.

"Cried! Do you think there was any salt in those tears?"

"How on earth should I know? I saw plenty rolling down her cheeks."

The woman shrugged her elegant shoulders.

"Men are always sentimentalists!" she exclaimed.

"I don't call that sentiment. There was not a doubt in my mind that she was fearfully cut up. You admitted yourself, before we got there, that she was pretty keen on the chap. I don't suppose she cared for him any the less because she saw it was better to give him up. Why, they've been engaged for five years."

Through all this conversation Nanno and Jerningham were silent. They could not help listening; the people made no effort to lower their voices. It is almost a sign of breeding nowadays to talk with a loud voice.

"Hadn't they been engaged five years?" the man continued.

"What has that to do with it?"

"Good deal, I should think. You can't obliterate five years in five minutes."

"No, *you* couldn't; but a woman can—if it's to her own advantage. Now, I'll just tell you something—merely for the sake of opening your eyes."

"Well?"

"You heard her say—didn't you—that she didn't care whether he had five thousand a year or fifty thousand?"

"Yes."

"Well, when you went into the hall, she crossed to the glass over the mantelpiece, dried her eyes, settled her hair a bit, and then came and put her hands on my

shoulders. 'Has he really five thousand a year?' she said. I told her, of course, that we knew it for an absolute fact. Then she dangled about with that pendant you gave me, and asked me what he'd said and I told—putting it the best way I could."

"I know," said her companion, nodding comprehensively.

"And then—what d'you think she said?"

"I don't know."

"She said, 'Of course, I'm sure I shall like him awfully, when I get to know him a little better—he's frightfully good-natured.' 'And he's got five thousand a year, which is more than ten times better than an uncertain five hundred,' I said. She nodded. 'Is he very much in love?' she said then. Then I nodded. And then she laughed—it was the sort of giggle when a girl is paid a compliment. 'I'm awfully lucky, aren't I?' she said."

"Did she really say that?" the man asked, amazed. "Did she say that she was lucky?"

"Of course she did—so she is."

"Good heavens! And she was crying again like a fish when you came out into the hall again."

"Well, you can't expect a woman to show everything she's feeling before a man. I assure you sentiment is mostly a pose when you find it in women. Men buy and women sell—there must be some bluff somewhere over a transaction like that. She laughed, but the man—and he was evidently her husband—looked at her with dazed comprehension.

At the next station they got out, and then Jerningham and Nanno looked at each other. Throughout the whole of the conversation they had not said a word. The whole affair had been so consecutive, so obvious. It was a com-

plete story of life, ripped from the seam. As soon as the carriage door had closed, Jerningham laughed ironically.

"Did you listen to all that?" he asked.

"I did."

"What did you make of it?"

"The way some friend of theirs was going to be married to one man, and they'd been to persuade her to break it off for another with more money."

"That's it. The friend I should imagine was the woman's sister. But what did you think of it?"

"I don't know that I thought anything."

Jerningham leaned forward on his seat and looked up at her.

"I did," he said—"I thought a good deal. It's more or less true what that woman said—men want to buy and women have to sell—it's the proper thing for a woman to be married; either for the look of it or the homing instinct. But, my heavens—surely every woman doesn't bluff, does she?" He half paused, in tentative expectation that she would answer him.

"You wouldn't bluff—would you, Nanno?" he went on, putting the question more seriously and directly to her.

She looked frightened into his eyes.

"What d'ye mean by bluff?' she asked, relapsing into her old use of the pronoun.

"Would you pretend you loved a man in order to get him to marry you, if you thought he had a comfortable position to offer?"

"I would not," she said, half confused by the inpulsive intensity of his question.

"Would you marry a man," he persisted, little thinking how he was torturing her mind, "simply because he

could better your position in life, or because you considered that a woman's only justification is marriage?"

For a moment before she answered, she wondered whether it would be right for her to say what she really thought. For fear he might think too well of her, ought she not to make herself a disappointment to him and answer that she would marry any man who could give her a comfortable home, and that from a sense of duty to herself? An inner voice cried to her that this was untrue. And why should she tell him an untruth? She had been forced into marriage with the man who was her husband; that alone proved to her that, if she answered as her conscience prompted, it would be false.

"Would you marry a man for either of these reasons?" he asked again.

She paused. "I would not," she said.

"You'd marry him because you loved him?"

"I would."

"Were you ever in love, Nanno?" he added.

She looked across the carriage with strained eyes, and though she did not see, she felt the intensity in his.

"Why do you ask me those questions?" she said piteously, with averted face.

Before he could reply to her, the train slowed down, and they entered a station.

"We get out here," he said. "This is Hitchin."

CHAPTER XIII.

While Jerningham went to see his client, Nanno wandered round the thriving little market-town. He had told her to meet him at four o'clock outside a shop of her own selection in the High Street, and until then—much to his disgust, and he admitted it—she was compelled to entertain herself.

Entertainment to Nanno consisted in looking into one shop-window after another; pointing out to herself in this one, various little things that she would like to buy for her room, and in that, speculating upon the price of hats or blouses which she knew were beyond the power of her pocket to purchase. Jerningham had tried to persuade her to go and wait for him in the hotel where they were to have tea, but this she refused. She felt sensitive about what people might think of her.

After much indiscriminate wandering, she at last reached the market-place. The half-lights of the evening were beginning to creep out of the shadows. Christmas was only two weeks away, and the square of stalls within the square of houses had already begun to light up their lamps.

The entire picture of the numerous sweet-stalls with their loads of brightly colored sweets, the vegetable-stalls with their burdens of brilliant greens and glaring reds that picked out daubs of color with no outline and no shape, offered such an effect as a Whistler might have produced. No great ability of technique would have been needed for

its representation upon canvas: only a heart that loved it for its dull, soft beauty's sake, for its cunning indefinability and its subtle gradients of light. Here and there a face of a man or of a woman would be lit up in profile by the light of a smoky lamp. The stalls all lost their shapes in the shadows that surrounded them. Backgrounded on every side by the deep tones of the houses of the square, the outline of one thing was washed into another; whilst, here, there, and everywhere, lightless patches of color and splashes of orange from the lamps stole away out of the mist and reached the eye with efforts of relief.

To Nanno it appealed indefinably. For some moments it made her think of the Pattern day at home and, until it was time for her to go and meet Jerningham, she waited there and watched the business that was being conducted on every side of her.

At length, when the church clock struck the hour of four, she turned away in the direction of the High Street. The lamplighter was already going his rounds. One by one, as he passed down the street, a little beacon was kindled in its brazier and sought out its reflection in the puddle that made murky mirrors in the road. In less than five minutes she would be with him again; he would perhaps be asking her the same questions which the arrival of their train in Hitchin had put an end to. What did it mean? And how should she answer them? During the hour in which she had been away from him, she had tried to think it all out. What lay behind those questions he had asked? She did not rightly know. She could not believe that there had ever entered his consideration a thought of marrying her. There was nothing in her to sufficiently attract him to that; it was for this reason, as much as any other, that she felt so grateful to him for

his friendship. No man, she thought, would ever see in the poverty of her breeding, the lack of her education, so much as he had seen. Yet, creating the most unlikely suppositions, if it were so, that he even for a moment had thought of making her his wife, would it not be right for her to tell him now; to break up their friendship at once by giving him the truth about herself?

When she saw him in the distance; when she saw the smile of eagerness that broke over his face, she said she knew it would be right.

"It must be!" she exclaimed under her breath as she approached him, and there was a catch in her voice, the voluntary breaking of her own happiness. It was the first times since she had left Ireland that the iron yoke had begun really to bite into the flesh; but she set her teeth, her eyes smiled when she met him. He did not know that she was walking into the valley of the shadow of death—the death of all her hopes, of all her hold on life. Beyond, there seemed nothing to her but the gray, forbidding light, as when the morning had broken after the night when she had first left her husband.

"You must be fearfully cold," he said; and he took her arm in such a way that she could not deny him. "We'll get the tea right away."

He brought her back to the hotel, and there in the coffee-room, before a blazing fire, where big logs of wood were burning with an aromatic scent, they had their tea served.

"Well, what did you think of Hitchin?" he asked, rubbing his hands at the blaze and all the time watching her as she poured out the tea.

"'Tis a nice little place," she said. "I was looking at the market for some time. Do you know what it reminded me of?"

"No."

"The Pattern in Rathmore."

"Ah—by Jove, yes—the Pattern. Do you remember that evening when you talked to me about saints?"

She nooded her head seriously.

"I've often sat up alone in chambers and thought about you that night. And d'you remember when I brought you back to Troy's Lane——?"

"We stood at the gate."

"Yes—and then, when we heard some one laughing inside in the cottage, I asked you if that was why you hadn't liked to go home."

"I remember."

"And you didn't answer: you simply said—good-night."

"Did I?"

"Yes—that's what you said, and then you went across the yard into the kitchen. But I still stayed at the gate."

"Oh—Mr. Jerningham!"

"I saw you open the door—I heard the laughter and singing again, and I saw a crowd of men who, from the look of them, had been drinking; and that *was* why you hadn't liked to go home—wasn't it?"

For a mere moment she tried to look into his face. The thought that even then, when they had been acquainted for so short a time, he had watched over her and understood her, filled her with a gratitude which in that one moment glittered like a luster in her eyes. The next moment the luster was dissolved; her eyes filed with tears. If he understood her then, how much more did he not understand her now; and now, she was to sacrifice him to the inviolable law. The great God of Fate was calling upon her to pay her price and, with the price in her hand, she stood at the counter of life broken with her misery, shaken with her sobs.

For that brief moment when she had looked at him with gratitude in her eyes, she had known that her time of payment was due, if not overdue, and she tried to face it with a brave heart and unshaking lips. The effort had been genuine, but it had failed. Her lips quivered, her eyes filled, and then, with shoulders racked by her sobbing, she hid her face in her hands and cried as though endurance could endure no more.

At first he was amazed. He had not followed her train of thought; he could not see the reason for this sudden outburst of weeping. But that did not alter the effect it made upon him. A man believes that he understands a woman better when first he sees her tears; in fact, to Jerningham, this was the one moment of intimacy needed to blow the spark of his passion into a devouring flame. As he saw her there with bowed head, and tears streaming through the fingers that covered her face, he knew that she was more to him than anything he had yet known—the essential need, the essential influence in his life.

"Nanno!" he exclaimed, and his arms held her. "Don't cry, Nanno! What is there to cry about? I've guessed all along that your life hasn't been particularly happy—but it's going to be happy now."

It would not have entered his head that it was because of the possibility of this that she was crying.

"It's going to be happy now," he repeated.

She looked up at him regardless of her appearance. There were pools of salt tears in the corners of her eyes, just ready to tumble down her cheeks in heavy drops. She looked the essence of her own misery.

"What d'ye mean by that?" she asked, with shaking voice.

"I mean that I'm going to make your life happy for you; I'm going to take you out of those lonely rooms of

yours; I'm going to marry you—if you'll let me. Nanno, I love you; I want you to be my wife."

"Glory be to God!" she exclaimed hoarsely, and then her sobbing made it impossible for her to speak. She covered her face once more. She did not want him to look at her then. She knew that crying made her ugly, but he was not aware of it. The quaint contortion of her lips only made him love her the more.

"Wouldn't you be happy, then, Nanno?" he said softly, putting his head close to hers. "Wouldn't you?"

"Oh—I would—I would—I know I would!" she moaned.

He stood up with the look of conquest in his face. He stretched his arms above his head with an overwhelming sense of possession, as though he were trying to grasp all that he believed he had gained.

"You love me, then, Nanno?" he asked, bending over her.

She stood up suddenly and faced him, the knowledge of the inevitable driving the tears away before it.

"Yes—I love you," she said tensely, "I love you with every breath that comes out o' me—but I can't marry you —I can't—I can't."

He fell from the altitude of his sense of conquest. It was the falling of a tower, like an old man dropping with fatigue. His arms hung motionless at his sides. His eyes looked at her without understanding.

"You can't?" he repeated. "You can't?—why can't you?"

His mind was inert. He struggled to grasp the meaning to what she said. He hunted for her reasons in his thoughts as a blind man fights with the darkness to find his way. She had not said it petulantly, as a woman who dallies with her prize and loves to play it with unyielding

line. She had meant what she said. He realized that in the passion of her words. The thought that he had lost her at the very moment when he believed that she was found was like a blow across his eyes. He could see nothing but sudden flashes of reason that had no meaning in them. Then, with all its power, he understood his love for her.

"Why can't you?" he asked again.

"'Tis the way I—I—I'm married already."

Once she had said it, her courage fell like a pack of cards. She sank back into her chair. He knew it now. Nothing could take back the words. He knew it. She might cry to him now that her words were a lie—it would remain the same. He knew it. At the bottom of her heart she was not sorry. It seemed as though she had humiliated herself to the rack of confession, and with the reaction she felt a deep conviction of content. She had put herself beyond temptation. He would hate her now, and with closed eyes she waited for the first torrent of his words.

But no torrent came. For a time he could only stand and gaze at her sitting there, as though some blow had staggered him, and he were gathering his senses for a fresh onslaught.

Once or twice he put his hand up to his eyes. Once or twice he half turned, as though to leave her. At last he spoke; his voice had lost its vitality. In one moment it had aged.

"Why haven't I been told!" he asked. It seemed as though he lodged the complaint against every one. He did not throw the blame on her alone. "Why haven't I?" he repeated.

She stared into the fire. The big logs of wood burned just as brightly as before. She looked round the room;

nothing had altered. Yet within the last five minutes everything as she saw it had changed. The cheerful flames from the fire were laughing spitefully; the comfortable coffee-room had become gaunt and gray with the spirit of her own misery.

"Why haven't I been told?" he repeated once more.

"Oh—shure, I never knew," she said. "How could I know that ye'd come to care for any one like me? Shure, I'm only waiting in a restaurant—I've been a servant waiting at a table on ye—how should I know?"

"Haven't I shown you at all? Didn't I ask you up to chambers? Haven't I been to see you in your own rooms? Didn't I take an interest in you in Ireland?"

All these different things he cited bitterly, at last realizing they had been the steps towards the passion that now was consuming him. It seemed, when he thought of it, that she must all the time have seen them in that light.

"Didn't I come and look you up directly I'd seen you in London, and haven't I shown you in a hundred different little ways?"

If she had only realized this at the first, how willingly would she not have told him everything that very day when he had come to Maynard's to see her! How willingly she would have sacrificed all the pleasure of his companionship to save him the pain that now she knew he felt. But it was too late. This was one of the positions in the game of life that always come unexpectedly. She could do nothing to save it now.

"Why don't you answer me?" he persisted. "Haven't I deserved that much generosity from you?"

With that word—"generosity"—she was stung to defend herself in his eyes. She could not let him continue to think that of her.

"Oh—don't think that, Mr. Jerningham," she pleaded. "'Twas not because I didn't think generously of ye—'twas not, indeed 'twas not. If I'd ever dreamed it was going to come to this, I'd have told ye when first ye came to see me at Maynard's; but how could I know that ye'd ever think like this of me?—only a farmer's daughter in Rathmore—and ye, in society here in London."

When she mentioned that word—"society"—he laughed—shortly, sharply, bitterly.

"Well, then, we were friends only—if you like. Couldn't you have told me in the common cause of friendship?"

She hung her head. Now he had reached the core of her weakness, now she was to expose herself to him in all the poorness of her mind. But she did not flinch from it.

"I didn't want to lose yeer friendship," she said innocently. "I thought if I told ye, ye'd go away from me, and 'twas the way I felt so lonely in London. It was like being at home to see ye."

That touched the bigness of his heart. He stretched out and clutched her hand.

"My God!" he exclaimed, with quiet intensity, "what a fiasco the whole thing is! Here am I, just thirty-five, having taken all these years to realize what it means to be in love, and then discover that I've learned my lesson from a married woman who can give me nothing in return. God! what a fiasco!"

Nanno hid her face in her hands. She could say nothing; she could plead for nothing. Through her fault the man she loved was to suffer, when by every right he deserved the happiness that circumstance forfeited from her.

"But tell me," he went on. "Where's your husband? Where were you married? When? Why aren't you liv-

ing with him now?" He poured out the questions from the bitter desire to know everything, as one spills away the surface liquid from a tankard overfull.

Then she told him the whole story, from the moment when he had left her that night in Anesk. Every word of it was guarded by a gentle reticence, by which, unconsciously, she only added to the tragedy it contained. She offered no judgment upon her husband. She did not hasten to qualify her reasons for leaving him. Nothing in the telling was exaggerated; it was just the plain and simple story of a miserable life—misery such as Jerningham could not credit to have entered Nanno's knowledge. Putting short questions here and there, where he did not fully understand, he listened to it all in dazed bewilderment and compassion. Sometimes he emitted exclamations of pity, sometimes of incredulous revolt; and when she reached the climax—her leaving Jamesy on that night of the threshing—he looked at her, amazed to think what agony of soul she had been through, astounded at the powers of her endurance and recuperation.

"We'll be late for the last train, Mr. Jerningham," she said quietly, when she had finished. A clock on the wall at the other end of the room pointed to a quarter of the hour before seven.

He rose slowly to his feet, obeying her suggestion instinctively, yet with his mind churning the thoughts of all he had just heard. One idea was gradually taking shape in his view of the whole matter. She was not utterly beyond his reach. There was still an arm which, outstretched, could reach her—the far-grasping arm of the law. There was sufficient evidence, there was sufficient cause, to enable her to obtain a divorce. Unfaithfulness and cruelty—nothing more was needed. A decree nisi would be granted for that, and then she would be his.

She loved him; she had admitted it. The whole outlook seemed to brighten as the plausibility of it became clearer to his mind, but, until they were once more seated in a carriage of the train, where there was no likelihood of intrusion, he said nothing.

Time seemed interminable before the guard blew his whistle; but at length they felt the vibration of the engine and the train moved out of the brightness of the station into the dark country beyond. Then Jerningham leaned forward with his elbows on his knees.

"Nanno," he said, with quiet conviction, "you're going to marry me."

She gazed at him pitifully, as though it were a sorry jest to her.

"You're going to marry me," he repeated.

"If Jamesy were to die?" she asked. "Ah, shure, you couldn't wait on for the hope of that. There are other women in the world beside me, Mr. Jerningham; better women—women that are better educated than what I am. I beg you not to spoil your life by thinking any more about me. I'm not good enough for it." Her lips quivered as she made this voluntary renunciation. She felt the saying of it as though it were the approaching act itself.

"There's no need to wait until he dies," he said, triumphant with the belief in his own mind.

"What d'ye mean?"

"You're going to divorce him. He's been unfaithful to you—you have witnesses and evidence of that. He has beaten you shamefully—you have witnesses and evidence of that. These two things are quite sufficient to get a divorce."

She listened to him with a fear that numbed her senses. Here were the words of Father Mehan come to actual

truth. To her mind, it was as though he had prophesied this very incident and, filled with susceptibilities that almost amounted to superstition, she felt that she was trapped already. In her vivid imagination she saw the doors of the Church slowly swinging to upon her helpless body.

"There is no divorce in our Church," she said, with a dull voice.

He sat up in his surprise. "But surely there must be some way out of a ghastly situation like this. Do you mean to tell me——?"

"There is no divorce in our Church," she repeated, and behind that sentence with its hopeless brevity she crouched —a whipped animal cowering to the hand that beats it.

"But surely," he persisted, the instinct of a British law-giver standing like a giant in the path of his understanding, "surely the tie of marriage is broken by such a man as Ryan! He's not your husband any longer—he's discarded you. The law of England, of which you're a subject, gives you release from such a man."

"Oh, don't say any more, Mr. Jerningham!" she said once more. "I tell ye there is no divorce in our Church."

CHAPTER XIV.

SEVEN long days with long, sleepless nights passed by after Jerningham's parting with Nanno that evening, before she saw him again. She did her work in the restaurant as though driven by a power outside her comprehension; her actions became those of a machine—painful, unconscious in their accuracy.

As one day succeeded another, the belief sank deeper into her consciousness that Jerningham had exhausted every feeling for her, even that of the slightest interest. In imagination, she saw herself in his mind a withered, hollow resemblance of something that had scarcely been worth while. She felt the cold pass through her like the current of a stream when she thought of the loneliness of life that lay before her. Yet, still, methodically, persistently, she continued with her duties, arriving at Maynard's as though the hands of the clock were leading her; winding herself up for the day's work before her, then slowly using out her energies until, by the time that she returned to the Fulham Road, she was swaying between a balance of exhaustion and relief.

One evening, Miss Shand took it upon herself to accompany her for part of the way back to her lodgings. Jerningham's words to her that night still had their echoes; they had just succeeded in hurting a sensitive side of her nature, and she could not forget them. On this particular evening they stirred her to a generous impulse.

"I've been wanting to tell you something," she said, as they picked their way between the puddles, "since that night when he went back home with me." She left it to be tacitly understood to whom she alluded.

"Did he go home with you?" Nanno asked apprehensively.

"Well—he didn't come in, of course—why I'd only met him that evening. But this was what I wanted to tell you, dear, because, if you remember, you said he was only a friend."

"What is it?"

"Well—just say you remember, because it spoils it all if you don't."

"I do—I do remember."

"Well, dear—you're making a great mistake," said Miss Shand, with a sense of the dramatic. "He's in love with you; in fact, though perhaps I oughtn't to be sayin' it, he as good as told me so. What I mean, he gave the show away."

She was watching Nanno, expecting to see wonderful results from the effect of her information. She saw none. Nanno's face was expressionless. A stone-mason, with rough chisel and heavy hand, could have hewn more life out of a piece of granite. Miss Shand's generosity was fruitless, and she felt disappointed.

"I think you might thank me for finding out that much for you," she said. "It'll help you knowing what to do with him next time."

"I'm sure it's kind of you," said Nanno unemotionally.

Miss Shand, in her chagrin, almost stamped her foot. She felt that she had been generous and, fully expecting reward, had received none.

"Poor sort of thanks I call that," she said petulantly; and she stopped.

Nanno turned round. "Are you going?" she asked, in the same tone of voice.

"Yes—that's just what I am going to do!" she exclaimed; and hailing a 'bus that passed she left Nanno standing on the pavement.

This little incident had occurred five days after the journey into Hertfordshire. Two more days still went by under the same conditions of loneliness and, as with the days, so with the week itself; her energies slowly became exhausted with each succeeding day as a clock that is run down, until by the time that Saturday came round she found it impossible to walk back to her rooms in the Fulham Road, and was compelled to resort to an extravagance that she never permitted herself to take. She got into a 'bus that would pass her door and, when she alighted, it seemed an effort to cross the road.

Mrs. Hudson, after a considerable period, had placed sufficient confidence in her as to bestow upon her the honor of a latch-key—an unwieldy piece of metal that weighed down heavily in her pocket, and constantly wore holes in the lining. With this she let herself in, and walked straight upstairs to the sitting-room into which her bedroom opened. She did not notice a letter, addressed to her, that lay on the rickety table in the hall. The hall, Mrs. Hudson called it—the passage, said Miss Shand whenever she came.

Unprepared, unexpectant, she walked abruptly into the sitting-room, and when she saw Jerningham seated in the horsehair arm-chair, an involuntary cry forced its way through her lips—she was too weak to repress it.

"Why have you come?" she asked, still standing at the door.

He rose to his feet, at the same time taking out of his

pocket a bundle of papers which he laid emphatically on the table.

"That's why I've come," he said, pointing to them with a smile of satisfaction. "Oh—by the way, I wrote you a letter telling you I was coming. I saw it down in the hall as I came up."

She remained holding on to the door, her face white, her lips that were deep red, almost bloodless.

"Good heavens!" he said, as he suddenly realized her condition. "You look awfully bad—what's the matter?"

She came slowly into the room, laying her hand on the back of the first chair that came within her reach.

"We've been working rather hard this week," she explained. "I only feel tired."

"Come and sit in this arm-chair, then." He led her round to the seat he had just vacated, and placed her there. "Why isn't this fire lighting?" he went on. "You're as cold as a shroud. Why isn't it lighting?"

Her eyes rose to his for one moment, smiling gently, as though he had asked the question in fun.

"I can't afford to be extravagant," she said. There was no complaint in her voice.

Jerningham strode across the room to a bell-handle, which hung loosely in the plaster of the wall. He pulled it with a jerk, and some of the plaster fell with a white dust to the floor.

"What's this fat woman's name?" he asked.

"Mrs. Hudson. Why—what are you going to do?"

"Order a fire. This is not the way for you to live."

The landlady entered the room, having discreetly knocked.

"We want a fire, Mrs. Hudson," he said. "Will it take you long to light it?"

The suggestion that her actions were ponderous and slow offended her somewhat.

" 'Twon't take no longer than gettin' the sticks and the paper, I suppose. There's coals in the box."

"Thanks," he replied genially. "Well—will you get it at once."

Her small eyes looked him up and down. She objected to the sound of proprietorship in his voice. Still, a fire had been ordered, and that meant sixpence. She came to the inevitable conclusion that obedience was better than sacrifice, and departed.

Jerningham turned back to Nanno.

"Now," he said, "as soon as the fire's lit and I've settled you comfortably—I want to go into this matter here." He laid his hand again upon the papers.

Nanno looked at them with curiosity. It did not enter her head what they contained. Then, curbing her impatience to know their meaning, which she realized must in some way be the object of his visit, she went into her room, making the excuse that she wished to remove her coat and hat. As soon as she had closed the door she crossed to the bed over which hung the gaudy picture of the Sacred Heart, and before that she knelt, with clasped hands whose sense of touch had been driven from them with the cold.

"O Sacred Heart of Jesus," she whispered—"if 'twas the way I was going to die now, be with me and help me if he asks me to marry him again. I'm afraid he will, and I'm afraid of myself, because I love him. O Sacred Heart of Jesus"—she tried to say more, but what she had already prayed contained all her fears; fears that she felt weak and incompetent to battle with. Then she rose to her feet, took off her coat and hat, and came back into the sitting-room.

By that time the fire had been lighted. Obeying Jerningham's suggestions, without knowing why, Mrs. Hudson had gone to the extremity of using a candle-end to hasten matters, and now it was burning brightly, the grease spitting and crackling like fat in a frying-pan.

Nanno seated herself in the horsehair arm-chair and, behind her back, Jerningham placed a cushion bearing some floral design in many-colored wools, which a daughter of Mrs. Hudson's had made during an attack of measles.

"Is that comfortable?" he asked.

She nooded her head, smiling: the sensation of being taken care of was luxurious after the week of servitude.

"You'll be much warmer presently," he went on; then, drawing up a chair where he could watch her face, he reached for the papers that were still lying on the table and began to undo the little piece of tape that held them together.

"I expect you're wondering what on earth I've got here?" he said.

"Yes—I am."

"Well, I'll tell you. I've been spending all my spare time during the last week with solicitors."

"Solicitors?" The name brought back to Nanno's memory the one solicitor with whom she had ever had any dealings—Mr. Donegan, in Anesk. As though a magician had passed his wand over a black mirror, she saw in her mind the reflection of that untidy office where the deeds of settlement of her marriage had been signed. She heard the little man's stuttering voice; she heard her mother wrangling with Jamesy over the amount of the dowry. It was quite natural that she should at once connect the word with the event of marriage; and, moreover, her instinct was perfectly right when she presumed that it was for this very reason that Jerningham had been to see

them. Involuntarily she shrank back in her chair, because she knew that temptation was about to assail her again.

"Yes—solicitors," he went on—"hard-headed, hard-hearted City solicitors, who wipe off sentiment from the soles of their feet when they enter their own offices."

"Well?" she said apprehensively. She dreaded to hear what he had done.

"Well—you say that there is no divorce in your Church, but what you ought to say is that your Church doesn't recognize divorce. You've got to remember that it's not the Church that grants divorce in the first instance; it's the law. Now you come under the laws of England, and amongst them *is* the law of divorce. Your Church may not recognize it, but there it is; and when you are divorced you can marry again, no penalty attaching itself to you, no sin being committed. The number of people who do it are as many as flies in June." He spoke as though he were a solicitor himself, so deeply had he been immersed in their opinions during the last seven days.

"But you don't understand, Mr. Jerningham," she began, and her voice was tired even then, at the beginning.

"Wait a minute," he interrupted—"I understand everything. I've made it my duty to understand. Without mentioning any names I've put your case before two or three solicitors and have got here their advice in writing, with quotations from other cases that have occurred in the courts. You *can* divorce this husband of yours. I can quite understand that the people amongst whom you have been living have never had the means to set you the example, and so you have come to think it impossible. But it's not impossible. It'll cost a good deal of money, perhaps, because I think your husband has to be resident here as well as you, just for a certain time. It'll cost money to collect the witnesses; but all that expense I'm ready to

defray. You are bound to win the case, so that to a certain extent they will be lessened; but whatever they are—I don't care." He left his chair impulsively and knelt down beside her. "I'm going to marry you, Nanno," he said intensely. "Nothing's going to be put in my way. You love me—you've admitted it. I know that as far as that goes you'd marry me to-day—wouldn't you?"

She did not answer, but he read her silence as consent.

"Well—the other thing—the other objection, you're going to leave that to me to overcome. Nanno"—he took her face in his hands—"I've been living the life of the ordinary man—no worse, no better; and there comes a time when, if he's ever going to shake it off him, a man must chuck it up and take into his own life the life and heart of a woman who directs all his intentions and brings the best out of him. I didn't know there was such a woman till I met you." He let her free, but only to imprison her numbed hands in his. "And do you know," he went on, "already you've saved me from one piece of folly." He told her the incident with Miss Shand, and while he told it he held her head against his shoulder.

"For the sake of that alone," he continued, when the incident was told, "do you think I'm going to let you go? And then I love you, apart from all that. I can make you happy—I can make you comfortable. The whole of your life I can reconstruct."

The tears were hurrying down her cheeks. For her sake, and because of her, he had resisted temptation, when she had no claim upon him whatsoever. She could not for one moment have blamed him had he given way; but because he had resisted, her love for him amounted almost to adoration. To think that she was an influence for good in his life, this was surely the hardest form of temptation to resist. To be an influence upon the actions of a man, this

is the zenith of a woman's desires. Watch them—you will see that it may be for good or it may be for bad; if not the former, then she may resort to the latter; but an influence she must be at all costs. And when she learned that she possessed that power over Jerningham, Nanno was at the nearest point to giving way. It was when he returned to the argument of paying every expense, which to him seemed irresistible, that her slender courage returned, and with clasped hands and cold lips she told him of its impossibility.

"If I were to be divorced and to marry again," she said expressionlessly, "the Church would close its doors against me—I should be excommunicated."

Bitter words, revolting against such a law, rose up to his tongue, but for her sake he kept them back. It would have been impossible with the logic of his faith for him to reconcile his mind to such drastic punishment. Such a law, he told himself, as she declared it, was unchristian to the very heart of it. Such a law did not uphold the forgiveness of sins, but the eternal damnation of them. To him, it was as though the hands of man, stained with sin—even were it only that of origin—had closed the gates of Heaven in the face of God. He could not see it from her point of view and, because it affected him no less than it did Nanno, he railed against it in his mind.

"Well, then, be excommunicated!" he exclaimed at last. The words were driven from him. He was an Englishman, and common law was impregnated in his blood. "Be excommunicated!" he repeated; "that doesn't deprive you of your belief in the goodness of God—that doesn't rob you of your faith in Christ—that doesn't spoil you of your love of the Virgin Mary—be excommunicated, and God will give you to me to take care of!"

She rose quickly to her feet.

"You must go," she said feverishly—"you mustn't say anything more. I love you—and I can't bear to listen. You don't know what you're saying. You're not a Catholic—you haven't been brought up as I have, or you couldn't say what you are saying. Who am I that I should dare to leave the Roman Catholic Church that's going on and on with the millions of people that follow it, years after I'm dead and buried? I'm nothing—simply a little speck. Those who've made that law——"

"The men who've made it," Jerningham bitterly interposed. She took no notice.

"Those who've made that law," she repeated, "have known far better than I do what's best for me. What right have I to question what they've done? I can only obey or disobey, and oh—Mr. Jerningham—if I disobeyed, and the Church closed its doors on me"—she invariably made use of the simile that Father Mehan had given her—"I couldn't go on living—I could not."

Jerningham laid his hands gently on her shoulders. Either the unquenchable belief of the man in himself, or the knowledge that she was overwrought, and could not consider the matter calmly, made him think that she did not thoroughly mean what she said.

"You're not in a fit state to talk about it now," he said softly; "I'm going to leave you by yourself. But in a few days I shall come back again—when you've thought it all over; and then—you'll tell me."

He kissed her forehead, curbing his passionate desire to kiss her lips; and then he departed.

CHAPTER XV.

NANNO sank back into the arm-chair as the door closed, and for an hour or more she stayed there, almost without movement. The struggle that had taken place within her, none of the signs of which she had shown to him, had left her powerless, impotent, inert. Sometimes her eyes opened and she gazed dully at the fire that he had caused to be lit and, cold though she was still, she had not the energy or the wish to benefit by its brightness.

On the table by her side lay the little sheaf of papers—the written statements of the solicitors who had advised him—just as he had left them. Occasionally her eyes watched them as though they were alive, which, indeed, to her they were—alive with the still pregnant power of temptation. She lay there in the arm-chair encouraging her feeling of exhaustion, because she knew that if she moved or left her place, she would succumb to the wish to read them, and beyond that she could see no certain road. So long as she lay there inert, passively resisting the inclination to be convinced that he was right, she could foresee her own victory. The terrors of excommunication had their full weight with her, and consciously, intentionally, she summoned all her power of imagination to picture them in her mind. She terrorized herself because she knew that if she did not persist in keeping their horrors before her, she would inevitably give way to the longing to yield

her soul and body to the man who had won her heart honorably for himself.

And thus, for an hour or more, she lay in the arm-chair tormenting, torturing herself with the terrors that she forced herself to depict; until the crisis of her temptation came with the contempt that is bred of familiarity. She had terrified herself for so long that the terror became secondary to her desire for happiness. She began to think that in his arms and in his life, with his body and his will to shield her, these scenes that she had been so vividly painting, like mediæval frescoes of Hell, might have but little effect upon her. She began to consider that she could face them through life if he stood by her. "Be excommunicated!" he had said, "that doesn't deprive you of your belief in the goodness of God—that doesn't rob you of your faith in Christ"—and all of it was perfectly true. Nothing on earth could rob her of those things; these she would always have with her.

It was when she came to the moment of this thought that she stood up with a frightened, muffled cry. She had come to the very verge of the edge and, looking suddenly below, there saw the awful abyss into which she had all but fallen. Below her there, far down beneath, she saw death without the last rites of the Church and, believing in the simpleness of her heart, and with the faith she had been taught, that without these no love of God or agony of repentance could bring her to the heavy locked gates of Heaven, she turned from the way she had been drifting, and rushed into the sheltering arms of her belief.

Without daring to look again at the papers that lay on the table, she went into her bedroom, put on her coat and hat, then went downstairs out into the street. As once before, in a crisis of her life, she turned her steps in the

direction of a church, and there, having prayed before the High Altar, she entered a confessional.

Within a few moments her story in every detail was told to the priest who heard her.

"What had I better do, father?" she asked, when she had finished.

He was an English priest. There was no sentiment about him. He did not paint pretty pictures of the signs of a forgiving God, or describe the horrors of a life made naked and ashamed by the ruthless hand of a Church. He was practical—to the point.

"You ask my advice?" he said plainly. "Then go back to your husband. Without her husband, however bad he may be, a woman cannot fight against the world and its temptations. It can do no good? Who gives you the right to say that? How can you tell? Do you take upon yourself the power of omniscience? It may be doing the greatest good in the world. No man is incapable of reformation. You think of the life hereafter; then make your life here such that it will merit reward. I don't suggest that it will be easy. I don't suggest that, if you do it, it will be bound to succeed. If I were to say so I should be giving you false hope. But there is good in the worst of us. God may help you to find it in him, and at least you will have done your duty."

She sighed involuntarily. She knew that he did not understand. No quality of remorse, no hope of better things, had she ever seen in Jamesy's character. She felt certain that if she went back to the farm in Glenlicky, things would be precisely the same. He had no love for her; had never really possessed it. There was no foundation in him for the better things. This she told the priest, haltingly, submissively.

"Then bring him over here," he replied. "You ask me

my advice, you wish to know what the Church would say—that is, the answer of the Church. It can offer no other answer. "Whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." This is the only way to save yourself from the temptation that besets you. For, be warned by me, so long as you are alone, this man of whom you speak will not leave you to yourself; the more so because he is not a Catholic, and could not understand your motives for withholding from him what he desires. And then, what will happen? You will not give way, perhaps, but he will induce you into sin. Now, what will you do? What will you do? I feel it my duty to hear you say before you leave the Church. What will you do?"

"I will send for my husband," she said, and her voice was the voice of one who sees death.

BOOK IV.

THE CROSS-ROADS.

CHAPTER I.

One midday, two weeks after the priest's advice to Nanno in the confessional, the Milford train deposited on the Paddington arrival platform a man whose bemused amazement in the midst of his strange surroundings was almost humorous. At every station where the train had stopped on its way up from Milford, he had alighted from his carriage and, with wide eyes, asked the first person he encountered whether he was in London. When at length he did arrive, he went through the same ceremony. On being told that he was at his destination, he stood on the platform outside his carriage with mouth half opened and impotent attitude. People as they passed him gazed, some with compassion, some with amusement, according to their mood, at his obvious bewilderment.

At last a porter, having already seen to the wants of one passenger on the train, approached him.

"'Ave yer got 'ny luggage?" he asked.

The man looked at him helplessly.

"'Ave yer got 'ny luggage?" he repeated.

"Shure, I dunno what the hell ye're sayin'," the man replied, with exasperation. "Where's me throonk?"

The porter assumed an attitude.

"Look 'ere," he said forbearingly, "if you want a box what nobody else 'll claim, why don't yer say so? It's down 'ere on the platform; I chucked it out myself." He moved away in the direction that he had indicated.

"Come on," he said, looking back; and Jamesy Ryan—this was indeed the genesis of Nanno's husband in London—moved awkwardly after him. He wore a rough tweed suit, ill-fitting, coarse in texture, the best of its type that Anesk could produce. His hat, a black, broad-brimmed, soft felt—not unlike the sombrero as worn in Spain—was one that is donned by men in Rathmore on Sundays and feast-days. His boots chinked merrily with nails as he walked, and his whole appearance only served the more to alienate him from his surroundings. He looked servile; in that vast area, roofed in with glass, and vibrating with the noise of the incoming and departing engines, he felt servile—an animal untrained to the stir of life cast headlong between the spinning-wheels of traffic. The cunning twinkle in his eyes was almost dead. A rough crossing from Cork and a tiring railway journey had subdued it. Whenever a train shrieked with its metallic whistle he turned and gazed about him with fogged amazement.

"Is this yours?" asked the porter, kicking an ungainly box that lay severely alone upon the platform.

"It is—what the deuce are ye kicking it for?"

"All right—all right. That won't 'urt it. Don't lose yer rag. Where are yer goin'?"

Jamesy gave him an address, as though he were confiding a secret.

"Well—yer better get a cab." The porter whistled to one that came leisurely forward and then, with a deft swing, he hoisted the box on to his shoulder. Jamesy looked at his slight, wiry figure, and marveled. Then he followed him to the hansom, made ungainly efforts to get into it, and finally subsided into his seat. The porter waited expectantly on the platform. Jamesy took no notice of him. At last the cab, detained for the porter's benefit, moved away.

"Keep an eye skinned on 'im," the porter called out to the driver—'E's made o' the bloody mint—'e is."

The driver opened the trap door and asked what address. Jamesy jumped at the unexpected sound of the voice. He looked wildly about him. When the cabman repeated his question, Jamesy looked up and saw a red face through a square hole in the roof.

"What is it ye want in the name o' God?" he asked. This second voice was as unintelligible to him as the porter's had been at first.

The driver pulled up his horse and asked the question for the third time, enunciating each word with comic emphasis. Ryan called out the number of a road in the byways of Earl's Court and they finally drove out of the station. He could not look everywhere at once; accordingly, he was so dazed that only a very few things reached his puzzled powers of observation. At the corner of one street he saw a barrel-organ being played by a navvy out of work. The man's wife, with a little child in her arms, was leaning up against the handle by which the instrument was drawn from one place to another. The handle caught and pressed in her dress, displaying with coarse brutality her approaching condition of maternity. A look leaped into Jamesy's eyes and he strained his attitude in the cab to watch her. A little farther on, a ponderous advertisement of a brand of whisky that he knew caught his eye. He gazed at that. Most of his impressions, however, were vague. Things passed too quickly by him.

At last the driver pulled up before a door. With some difficulty Jamesy descended. The driver lowered the box down from the roof of the cab on to the pavement. Ryan felt in his pockets, finally producing a shilling, and placing it in the cabman's outstretched hand. For a moment the

latter looked at it; then his gaze rested expectantly on Jamesy.

"'Ere—come on," he said. "I can't stop 'ere waitin' while you dive for 'em. Two shillin's my fare."

"Your what?"

"My fare—two shillin's."

"Is it to pay ye two shillings I am, and ye only drivin' me for twenty minutes? Shure, glory be to God!"

He brought out another shilling, laying it with the first in the patiently waiting hand.

"You ought to travel in a black Maria, that's what you ought," the driver remarked, as he turned his horse. "Cabs is too hexpensive for you. You try a black Maria next time yer goin' away for a week hend."

The satire was lost upon Jamesy, who was thinking of his two shillings. Just at that moment the door of the house opened and a sour-faced woman looked out.

"Are you Mr. Ryan?" she asked.

"I am," he replied, turning round with relief.

"Well—unless you want a policeman to move yer hoss you'd better come inside and bring that box with yer."

He did what he was bid with childlike obedience.

"Yer wife'll be back at 'arf-past six," she said, as she closed the door behind him, and at every moment she looked him up and down with unconcealed surprise.

"P'raps you'd like to go to yer room?" she suggested vaguely, thinking that he might improve with a change of clothes. She could not have supposed that these were his best.

He followed her upstairs like a dog retreating to its kennel and, going some few minutes later into the kitchen where a friend of hers had been sitting with her, the landlady deposited herself into a chair with an exclamation:

"Well, I never did in all my born life!" she said.

The friend waited expectantly to hear what it was that she had never done.

"If 'e's 'er 'usband," she went on, gathering breath, "she throw'd 'erself away—that's what she's done. Why a girl like that—you see'd her when she was 'ere the other night—didn't yer? A girl like that cud marry right well. She's only been 'ere three days, but I know the sort that's ladylike. Why, I've 'eard ladies in shops speak no better'n what she does." She pressed her hair back from her forehead, sighed heavily, and folded her hands in her lap.

"Phew! Ain't there a smell!" said her visitor, alluding to the normal odor of the kitchen.

Mrs. Randal filled her lungs with the surrounding atmosphere and closed her eyes imperturbably. "She's a damned sight too good for 'im," she said, still thinking of her new lodger.

"Don't you notice it?" repeated her friend, still referring to the scent that offended her. She looked suspiciously at a pot that simmered on the hob.

"Notice it? No! I'd like to see them meet when she comes in thi' s'evenin'." So Mrs. Randal continued to conjecture upon her latest lodgers, oblivious of the more apparent facts of life.

And upstairs, Jamesy was sitting on the spotlessly white bed, gazing at the floor, wondering why he had come to London. He knew that he was utterly out of his element. Through all those streets by which he had come, there was not one face that he had known in the throngs of people who had passed him by. He missed the faces that were friendly; he missed the places that were familiar. At last a dismal depression overcame him, and after a few heavy sighs he went downstairs, passing into the street.

"Will ye tell me the way I could find a public-house?" he asked of the first man that he met.

"Second turning to the left," the man replied, and looked after him with amused surprise.

He found the place and pushed his way into the bar. No one was there but the barmaid, a substantial woman with a coarse face, who sat on a stool reading a novelette. Whenever it got exciting she picked her teeth excitedly with the broken end of a wooden match. Jamesy watched her for a moment. At last she looked up.

"Beg pard'n," she said, laying down the book. "I thought someone 'ad come in and gone hout again. What's yours?"

"Whisky, please," he said.

She poured it out for him, passed him a jug of water, then reseated herself on the stool, returning to her novel. He leaned on the counter and watched her. The glass was only raised to his mouth twice; then he asked for another. She rose mechanically and poured it out.

"Won't ye be havin' any yeerself?" he asked.

She looked at him and smiled.

"Thanks—I don't mind—a glass of port's mine." She poured it out from a dirty decanter. Sediment swilled in with the liquid into the glass.

"'Ere's your very good 'ealth," she said, winking at him through the glass.

He winked at her, holding his up to his nose.

"Do you come from Scotland?" she asked, after she had licked her lips.

"Shure, I do not," he said, half laughing.

"Ireland, then?"

"Faith, I come from Rathmore—that's where I come from. Did ye ever meet any from Rathmore?"

She shook her head vaguely. She suspected that this was not only the second whisky he had taken that day.

For almost an hour he stood there talking to her. With

the third glass of whisky, his better spirits returned, and some of his native humor oozed out. The barmaid found him passable company, more especially while she was drinking a second port at his expense. She even forgot her nevelette, in which the hero was just coming through the wood where the heroine lay asleep.

When he asked for a fifth glass of whisky and offered her a third of port, she arrived at the conclusion that he was up from the country with more money than he knew what to do with and, as they parted, a seal of good fellowship was implied by her in the spasmodic way with which she pressed the horny hand he offered her.

He returned to his lodgings with a more favorable impression of London. In every respect he was in a more agreeable state of mind. He unpacked the big box and waited for Nanno's return in a state of expectant equanimity.

Soon after half-past six, Mrs. Randal wiped her hands on her apron and admitted Nanno by the front door.

"Has my husband come?" was the first question that she asked.

"'E 'as," Mrs. Randal replied conclusively as she closed the door. "'E's come."

With a nauseating sensation of apprehension, Nanno mounted the stairs. There were moments when, as her foot touched a higher step, she felt that she must turn back, fly out of the house, find Jerningham, and let the Church wreak its will against her. Yet her body moved on, bringing her nearer to the end at which her mind was shuddering as though, carried by some powerful force which she could not physically resist, her mind rebelled with every inch of ground. At last she stood outside the bedroom door, and hesitatingly her hand sought the handle. With an effort then to swallow the sensation that

rose to her throat, she opened the door and walked into the room.

Giving way to a feeling of fatigue that had been exaggerated by the whisky which he had consumed, Jamesy had lifted his heavy boots on to the white quilt which covered the bed, and had fallen asleep. His head was reclining on the pillow; his mouth, wide open, was emitting stertorous snores that one by one rose in pitch until they reached a climax when it seemed that he must choke. Then they stopped for a moment, beginning again in the lowest key and leading up slowly once more to the dominant. She stood there and watched him. She looked at the mark of mud that his boots had made on the spotless quilt. She thought of the tidy little room that she had had to herself in the Fulham Road. She looked round at the bare room that she must now share with him.

Then again she looked at him sleeping there. That night her face would be close to his. A sob of rebellious tears tightened in her throat. She bent down over the bed in an endeavor to try and realize how horrible it would be to sleep close to the face that was there before her. Then the odor of whisky reached her nostrils, and she stood upright with a moan of despair that parted her lips. Less than ever now could she tolerate a drunken man. For the last year she had never come in contact with one, The familiarity of it in Ireland had bred some sort of contempt; but now, even the girls she knew would run frightened from a drunken man who came near them on the footpath.

At the sound of her moan he sat up looking at her. The expectation of her return had been the last thing in his mind before he went to sleep; the realization of it he was not slow to grasp.

"Glory be to God—is that yeerself?" he exclaimed, and his eyes wandered over her from head to foot. As with

Jerningham, though with an infinitely slower degree of intellect, he could not connect the girl who had been his wife in Ireland, with this neatly dressed person who stood beside his bed. Never did a Christopher Sly wake more amazed to see madam—his wife. With the gradual subsidence of his surprise, he got down from the bed, still watching her.

"Begorra," he said, "'tis mighty changed ye are. Only for ye shtandin' there, I wouldn't have known ye." His eyes still rested on her and the old lust of her that had dominated him before their marriage crept through his blood. He forgot his own viciousness; he overlooked his own brutality. It seemed to him in that moment that she had for the last year defrauded him of herself.

"What the hell did ye mean by running away from me?" he asked at length. He did not speak violently, but his method of expression, which for so long her ears had been unaccustomed to, disgusted her. She turned away from him with a look of repulsion in her eyes. She turned away because, in the very outset of her effort, she did not wish him to see the smallest suggestion of failure.

"Why was it?" he repeated.

"I'd rather not talk about that," she said quietly. It was the first time that he had heard her voice. The sound of it amazed him as much as her appearance had done. He thought she was putting on airs, and for a moment it irritated him. He was on the point of expressing his irritation when he looked at her and considered that she must be treated gently—with what he considered gentleness—if he were to be allowed to gratify the desire that possessed him.

"Shure, if that's the way wid ye, we won't talk about it at all." He came closer to her and put his arm round her waist. She stood there like a pillar of stone.

"Aren't ye goin' to give me a kiss?" he said.

She turned a cold, white face to his. It would have been so much easier to look death in the eyes. He crushed her mouth with heavy kisses, then whispered something in her ear.

A shudder ran through her body. Her eyes looked as though they sought help.

"I'll have a meal sent up to you," she said. "I'd go to bed then, if I were you—you must be tired."

He admitted that he was.

"How about yeerself?" he asked. "Aren't ye goin' to have somethin' to eat?"

"No—I've had my dinner."

"Well—will ye come back here then?"

She walked to the door and held it open.

"Not to-night," she replied.

"Yirra, damn it all!" he exclaimed, taking a step towards her.

She slipped out of the room before he could reach her and closed the door, hearing his oath as she hurried down the stairs.

CHAPTER II.

NANNO had hoped that Mrs. Randal would have another room to spare her. Her determination was not daunted when she heard that it was impossible.

"Why ain't yer goin' to sleep wiv 'im to-night?" her landlady asked suspiciously.

Nanno looked worried.

"He's tired," she said—"he'll sleep better by himself."

Mrs. Randal sniffed. There was something in the affair that made friction against her peace of mind. She silently promised herself a strict surveillance of all their actions.

"You couldn't make me up a bed on the sofa in the sitting-room?" she suggested.

"What next hindeed?" asked Mrs. Randal.

"Oh, I should pay you for it," Nanno exclaimed.

"My best 'orse-'air sofa? No—thank you."

"Then I must ask a friend to put me up."

"Well—that's as *you* like—but if 'e's yer 'usband as you says 'e is—*your* place is wiv 'im, if you was to arst me. A tired man don't sleep no worse for 'is wife bein' wiv 'im."

Nanno left the subject, ordered a meal for Jamesy, and went out.

For the moment, when she had alluded to a friend, Nanno had thought of going to Miss Shand. After she had walked a little way, she put the thought out of her head. The last day on which they had parted they had

not been on very friendly terms, and since then, in the restaurant, Miss Shand's smile had been somewhat reserved. Pride finally compelled her to put it out of her mind. But in its place a longing had been growing in her thoughts, to go and see Jerningham's rooms. She knew the window that looked on to Middle Temple Lane and perhaps, if she stood there for a short while at some little distance, she might see him moving about inside. The mere fact of seeing him, she imagined, would help her to forget what awaited her at home. It was a mood of desperation —the last determination to watch the flame that had almost consumed her, before she went out once more into the utter darkness.

She did not know as yet whether Jerningham had come back to the Fulham Road to ask for her final decision. He had not been to see her at the restaurant, as she fully anticipated that he would, when he found her gone, leaving no address. Circumstances all pointed to the belief that he had given her a full seven days to arrive at the determination for which he was waiting.

Every step of the way to Middle Temple Lane, when once she had made up her mind, she walked. The expense of keeping two people in the new rooms that she had chosen was going to try her severely. But in her heart she hoped—expected—that Jamesy would try to find some work for himself. Ultimately she was disappointed in this. Jamesy was not the type of man who works to justify himself. In his own eyes no justification was necessary. He found himself in life with certain appetites, certain instincts, and these he did not hesitate to gratify. Work was not one of them.

Nevertheless, then at least at the outset, Nanno looked on the more optimistic side of the most pitiful situation that a woman has to face. She could not see any degree

of brightness before her. She had burned her boats. From the harbor of what might have been her refuge, she could mark the smoke rising in its columns of sacrifice, while before her lay the impenetrable endlessness of the open sea. But despair had not come to her then. The valley, which once she had described to Jerningham, where there lurkel the dull, gray, silent figure of Death, was still on the horizon; there were still roads to be taken which avoided it on the right hand or on the left.

It was after eight o'clock when she passed through the gates that open into Middle Temple Lane from Fleet Street. The porter in the little office, warming his hands and stamping his feet, looked through his window with healthy suspicion. He might have questioned had he wished, but he knew his business.

The Law Courts clock chimed the quarter as she reached Jerningham's rooms. For a moment after, the night seemed alive with the sonorous answers of a hundred other bells that clanged the hour, even into the far distance, like echoes in an empty house. Then everything was still. Nanno leaned against the railings opposite Plowden Buildings, gazing up at Jerningham's windows. There was a light there, as she had expected. At first it was only the light of a fire that flickered and wavered with the antics of a fawn; but after a little while a black figure came to the window, a match was struck; she saw him light the lamp that stood on the table.

This was the last time she would see him, she told herself, and in an endeavor to invest it with the semblance of truth, she repeated it as she watched him. This was the last time, the very last, the very last. Her vitality seemed to sink lower and lower with each word as she uttered it. Life went out of her as the liquid oozes out of a leaky vessel, when she forced its meaning upon herself. And

Jerningham, sublimely unconscious that the eyes he loved were watching him, added to the torture of her mind by remaining at the window engrossed in a book that he had picked up from the table.

So long as he stood there, she could not wrench herself away. It did not satisfy her that she had just seen him. She laid herself down willingly—eagerly—upon the rack of her own making and made the pain her pleasure.

At last he moved back into the room, out of sight; but it was only when the clocks again were striking the hour of nine that she turned away. The hope that he might return had been exhausted. The fear that she might mount the stairs and knock at his door was driving her. She passed down to the Embankment just as the gates were closing, but she dared not go home. All that night she moved from one place to another, resting here or there when there was no one to be seen, walking, as though with a definite purpose, when any one approached her. In the sky above her head, where the stars twinkled in the bitter night, she saw God—the God she could still worship, the God she could still call her own; but before her, around her, beneath her, was a great city, where she was alone.

CHAPTER III.

IN the mind of a woman, when life ceases to be a miracle it becomes a degradation. From the moment that Nanno resumed her duties as a wife to Jamesy Ryan, life lost its sense of mystery; the gossamer fabric of illusion with which she had clothed it was torn away, and in its naked reality she saw nothing but the gross hideousness of everything. Give a woman the truth, and she will idealize it in order to live with it. Deprive her of those cunning little instruments with which she makes ideals, and the truth is likely to degrade her. It degraded Nanno.

A convention of priests might have told her that her only course was to return to Jamesy Ryan, but they could not secure her mind against the degradation and loss of self-esteem that such a reunion would be bound to canker in her thoughts.

For that first night she fought against it, but the end was inevitable. Eating through the wax into the metal, the biting acid of truth was bent upon etching its picture of disgust. She was his wife; as her husband she had received him back. Within three days she loathed herself.

It was in this condition of mind that Jerningham found her when, going to the Fulham Road and being told that she had left with no address, he hastened the next day at four o'clock to the restaurant of Maynard's Stores.

"What's the meaning of this, Nanno?" were the first words he asked, when she came to serve him. "Do you think you've treated me fairly?"

She made no reply. He had never seen her look as she looked then.

"Why did you leave the Fulham Road without giving any address—without giving me the answer, negative or affirmative, either of which, at least, I deserved?"

"I told you that day," she said quietly, "what you asked was impossible. I should have been excommunicated if I'd done what you wanted."

"You count that as everything?"

"And isn't it?"

"'I thank whatever Gods there be for my unconquerable soul,'" Jerningham quoted.

"There's only one God," said Nanno simply. "Oh," she added bitterly, "you don't understand! How could you? You don't know what it would mean one day to die and know that no service would be read over your grave, that no prayers would be said for your soul in Purgatory. You don't know what it would mean to go straight into hell without absolution, and to suffer there forever and ever—never to know any relief, always to be in torment—always—think of it!"

"My God!" Jerningham exclaimed in an undertone, "do you believe that?"

"I must believe it," she replied.

"And if I married you, you believe that I should bring all that upon you?"

"I must believe it."

"You believe that the God you call all-merciful would damn your soul forever because you made the life of one man on this world a perfect happiness and filled it with a higher nobility of purpose?"

"I must believe it."

She felt that if she did not continue to say that she would break down.

Jerningham changed the tone of his voice. "Where do you live now?" he asked.

"Don't ask me," she said—"I can't tell you."

"You don't trust me?"

"Yes—I trust you with everything—I—I——"

"You can't trust yourself?"

"What are you going to have?"

"You avoid the question?"

"You must tell me what you want. I shall be blamed for standing here so long."

Jerningham accepted the inevitable, little thinking that, in those few moments, he went nearer to the winning of his purpose than he had ever been before.

"I'll have tea and bread and butter," he replied.

From the other side of the room, caressing her violin and thrilling each note in an endeavor to reach his ears, Miss Shand had watched them with comprehensive glances. From Nanno herself, though she had often tried, she had been able to ascertain nothing, but from Nanno's face, as Jerningham talked to her, the astute Miss Shand had seen the indubitable evidence of a quarrel. From her outlook on life she made her calculations. With dexterous intuition she brought the figures to balance, and then, as her violin, automatically obeying the mechanism of her fingers, sighed sobbingly through the sensuous movements of a popular waltz, she told herself sagaciously to wait and to watch.

Throughout the whole of his tea-taking, Jerningham did not notice her. He had forgotten her existence. His eyes rested on Nanno wherever she went. He was giving her up. He was breaking in his mind to the knowledge that what he had dreamed was a dream; that nothing, save the death of her husband, could make it a reality. The thought was not susceptible to taming, and he was not an idealist of facts. He looked the truth square in the face.

He had no claim on her; he would never possess any claim. As she wandered there from one table to another, a personality filling him with passion as unselfish as nature can permit it to be, he knew that she was nothing to him. He could not touch that earth-brown hair of hers—as in his imagination he had so frequently done—and call it his. Her deep gray eyes, like stones that lay at the bottom of a pool, they were nothing to him; and her mouth, those full, human lips, always half parted, ripe, like a peach, for the kisses that in his dreams of her he had so often devoured, all these were as the golden gates of Alexandria, buried, he knew well where, but buried, beyond his reach, in the fathoms of an ocean through which no man could dive.

When he called her for his bill, he was inert with the struggle through which he had passed.

"This is the last time I shall see you then, Nanno?" he said, looking up into her face.

"I suppose it is," she replied. She felt the room receding from her, and life was going with it.

"May I shake hands with you when I get up to go?"

"I think you'd better not."

"Not for the last time?"

"I think you'd better not."

"Then come down to the Temple this evening and say good-bye to me properly."

"I daren't."

"You daren't?"

"No."

"Then you must shake hands now."

He stood up and reached for his hat.

"Good-bye," he said, as he held out his hand. She took it timidly with hers. He seemed a long way away from her then. Everything was getting distant.

"God take care of you," he whispered.

She said nothing. She let him go. She heard the swing doors close to as he went out. She tidied up the table that he had left; then she turned and walked with a peculiar motion to the door that led into the attendants' dressing-room. That she opened. She passed through. She had scarcely closed it when she fell. One of the girls found her there later in the afternoon. They brought her to as shop girls will, with hysterical exclamations and pattings of her hand. When she opened her eyes she looked as though she had been away in search of death, returning disappointed.

CHAPTER IV.

Two months dragged themselves out. Their full value of time lost not one minute to Nanno. There is no such thing as Time. If the creatures of this world never died, Time, so called, would never have been invented. There is no Time before we are born; there is no Time after we are dead. But whilst we live we have invented little instruments of torture—chronometers, sand-glasses—to measure out our span; and every grain of sand that falls through the glass, and every tick of the pendulum in the clock, we call Time. But our own conception of it differs with every individual. To this man Time is long, to that Time is short. So even we ignore the accuracy of the inventions that we ourselves have made. To Nanno the period seemed eternal; yet to Jamesy, in whose conception London had become a place of pleasure, the moments passed impossible to count; but the clock in the sitting-room, with its gaudy-painted face and its hollow ticking moved none the faster or the slower for what they thought.

For the first week or so Jamesy was always at home when she returned. For all that she knew, he might have been there all day; but she did not ask any questions. It did not matter to her.

One day Mrs. Randal asked her where her husband worked.

"He doesn't work," she replied.

"What, not of a daytime?"

"Not at any time."

"Where does he take his meals in the middle of the day, then?"

"I don't know."

Mrs. Randal stared at her.

"Well, I'd make it my business if I was you," she said.

But Nanno did not feel it to be her business. She knew that nothing she could say to Jamesy would alter his goings. Once she had ventured to suggest that he should try and find some work to do. He stared at her in amazement. They were having supper, and if his mouth had not been overfilled with potatoes, he would have answered her at once. As it was, he swallowed his food too quickly in order to reply.

"What should I be doin' in the name o' God?" he asked. "Shure, didn't I sell the farm at Glenlicky before I came over—I did so—and, bigob, I got three hundred pounds for it. Faith, it'll be the divil's own time before I want any money."

The information that all this time he had had plenty of money, and did not so much as offer to pay for one of the expenses that his living with her incurred, so disgusted her with him that she could not bring herself to suggest what he might have done. She said no more about it.

When three weeks had passed, she came back one evening to find her room empty. The relief she felt was so great, that she did not think to question Mrs. Randal about him. Taking advantage of his absence, she read a novel that she had obtained from a free circulating library, and it was only when she was going to bed at twelve o'clock, that she realized what his staying away might mean. But as in the later days at Glenlicky, so now, she was becoming hardened. She did not care what hap-

pened to him so long as he did not bring his viciousness into contact with her life.

When she woke in the morning, it was to find the bed beside her unoccupied. Jamesy had been away all night. She said nothing to Mrs. Randal when she brought up the breakfast; but that virtuous individual was not prepared to let Nanno go to work while her curiosity had an empty stomach.

"Where was yer 'usband las' night?" she asked. She was waiting in the passage when Nanno came downstairs on her way to business. "Why didn't 'e come 'ome?"

"He had to stay away last night," she said. She would give no further information, and after she had closed the door, Mrs. Randal discussed the matter aloud with herself for at least half an hour.

Jamesy had returned when she came back in the evening. He could not look her in the face.

"'Twas the way I met a friend last night," he began awkwardly.

For a moment Nanno felt satirically inclined to lead him on to expatiate about the friend; but the growing callousness of her mind put the idea aside.

So the days became weeks, the weeks accumulated until the two months had passed. Every day her powers of feeling became more blunted, less defined; the fine edge of a blade that loses keenness with every coarse stroke; yet there grew steadily within her the knowledge that the end of her duty to the Church was drawing nearer and nearer. The priest who had advised her to recall her husband, would soon be compelled to admit that his advice was useless. Then, in one day, the climax came with its torrent, as the drops of rain that slowly merge together on the window-pane, and finally tumble down with their own weight upon the sill.

Arriving one morning at the restaurant, Mr. Mossop presented her with a letter.

"It's not customary—in fact, I may say it's against the rules," he said, "for any of our young ladies to give the Stores as an address."

"I have not done so," she replied quickly.

"Oh!—then, rather than get you into trouble, I'll say nothing about it—d'you see—I'll say nothing about it."

"Thank you very much." She took the letter that he was reluctantly holding out for her.

"And how are you now, Nanno?" he asked, wishing to make the best of the advantage of his generosity. "You haven't looked at all up to the mark since that day you fainted in the dressing-room—not at all up to the mark. Feeling so-so I expect?"

"I don't feel very well."

"Been to a doctor?"

"No."

"Well, now, there's a very good man attends me—he's quite A1, what I mean, 'e'd make his mark in Harley Street. I've often said so to him. Of course, he's not an M.D. and that's against him. He's only L.R.C.P.—M.R.C.S., and some people make the mistake when they see that on his plate that he's only a veterinary surgeon. Supposin' I send him along to see you. He's extremely reasonable—what I mean to say, he won't charge more than half-a-crown if he thinks you couldn't afford it."

Believing her letter to be from Jerningham, Nanno could scarcely control her impatience to get away from this garrulous man; yet she knew that it would be impolitic to show her lack of interest.

"I don't think I really want to see a doctor," she said, crumpling her letter in her hand.

"Very well," he said, with a shrug descriptive of his

belief that he was the wiser of the two. "It isn't because Dr. Fincham attends me, that he isn't a lady's man."

He smiled. He thought that there he had found the weak spot in her refusal. Thinking still more concretely, he shook his head in a playful manner that made him look like a mechanical toy, and departed.

Nanno went immediately to the dressing-room and tore open the envelope. Had she not been so hasty, she might have noticed that fingers had been engaged at the flap before hers. The sleek Mr. Mossop, in fact, believing the letter to have come from an admirer, had tried to force it with gentle persuasion. But Jerningham was not a man who licked envelopes with the tip of his tongue, and it had remained impervious to his effort.

"My Nanno," it began, and when she saw the words, she put it down for a moment and let the lump that had risen in her throat break into the tears in her eyes.

"MY NANNO,

"This is not written as a temptation to you. Consider that all temptation is past, and let me say good-bye to you here without the ghastly dinning of Miss Shand's violin in my ears or the clattering of teacups. I want you to think—I want you to believe that what you have made in me is made for all time. I don't believe I am a marrying man. I mean that, losing you, I shall not just get over it in the ordinary way, and then look out for some one else. Some one else would not do. I could have made proposals to you other than those of marriage which, perhaps I am utterly wrong in thinking, that, loving me as you do, you would not have hated me for. I could possibly have made such proposals to any other woman—looking in your eyes, I could not have done so to you. I suppose, to an extent, I am old-fashioned. I be-

lieve in marriage; though to look at it in your instance, almost shatters my belief. But I don't look at it in your instance—I only look at it as it would be with you and me. Supposing you were to come to me while he was still alive and tell me you could not live alone, I should take you in with all my heart and never think one thought of blame of you—but I could not ask you to do so myself. Should it ever happen that you want a home while he is still alive, what I have is yours for the asking. I say this: I put it in this way because I can never forget how I have in these last few months been urging you to something which in your eyes is a sin. I will never do that again, and this instance which I cite here now—I suppose—I don't know the laws of your Church—but I suppose that that would be a greater sin. I could not make you sin, Nanno. You are only meant for the praise and pleasure of the God who made you. And so I see I am wrong even in saying that I would take you in if you should come and ask me. I would not take you in. I would not. Whatever I have is yours, but I must take nothing that I long for from you. And so good-bye—good-bye, my Nanno."

This was a piece out of Jerningham's heart. The lancet of circumstance, keen-edged as a reed, had probed to depths that he had been unaware of, bringing away with it, when its incision had been complete, an expression of himself which his friends, still nicknaming him "the bachelor," would not have recognized, would not have believed.

Nanno put the letter to her lips. Her tears fell on its characters. The ink of the writing mingled with them. How was she to go back to the sordidness of her home, when in life there was a man who loved her like

this? She asked herself that question with everything she did. In all the carrying out of her duty during the day she put the question to herself. When she went up to the counter to demand tea for a customer, when she approached her customers to inquire what they wanted, that question looked defiantly out of her eyes. But by the evening the defiance vanished. As she walked home, she read the letter through once more; stopping for a few moments under the gas-lamps, lest standing under one until it was finished, she might seem conspicuous. It was the fruitless end of it all. When she had read it for the fourth time she realized that; but it in no way lessened the hideousness of that to which she was returning.

She had scarcely finished pulling the bell of the house when the door opened and Mrs. Randal stood before her. She was wiping her hands with vicious movements, and the attitude which she assumed, aggressively barring the way, brought into Nanno's mind at once the apprehension that something had occurred in her absence. She felt afraid to ask her what it was, but the irate landlady had no intention of keeping her ignorant. She took a deep breath at once and, at the sight of Nanno's expectant face, her lips became thin and white with the remembrance of how—as she would have described it herself—she had been put out.

"P'r'aps you'd like to know where your husband is," she said, closing the door and facing Nanno in the passage.

A dread that was nauseating made her limbs seem weak and powerless to support her. She leaned up against the wall, looking piteously at the woman who considered herself so infinitely much more injured than Nanno herself, who as yet knew nothing.

"What is it?" she asked, bewildered—"what's happened?"

Mrs. Randal folded her arms and, for a moment, seemed to permit herself to be inwardly consumed by a living crater of wrath: the convulsions of its burning contorted her face.

"Mind yer, if I don't just pack yer out of the 'ouse the moment what yer come in, it's because I'm a married woman myself, and it don't need a drop o' gin to make me feel sympathetic to others what's in trouble."

Nanno could bear it no longer.

"What is it, Mrs. Randal?" she pleaded. "Where is he?"

"Well—if you was to arst me I should say 'e was fast asleep in Bow Street."

"Where's that?"

"Well, it's a lock-up, but I couldn't tell you exactly the whereabouts of it. I ain't been there myself."

"He's in jail?"

"Where 'e ought to be."

"But what's he done?"

"Well—this is what 'e's done." She blew her nose with her apron, preparatory to a long story. "I brought 'im up 'is breakfast this morning after you'd gone, and when I come to clear away the things about an hour later—'e'd gone out. I'd never 'eard 'im, because I said to myself—noticin' a little bit o' bacon what 'e'd left on his plate—'I wonder what she'd say'—meanin' you—'if she see'd 'ow wasteful 'e was,' I said, and I shouldn't 'ave said that if 'e'd been there." So far her remarks were too obvious to be explicit, but she labored on. "When I found 'e didn't come in to 'is dinner at one o'clock, I went out myself and I told Annie, my youngest girl, to look after the door if any one came." Here she turned her head

in the direction of the remote parts of the house and cried "Annie!" with a strident voice that seemed to tear the membrane of her throat. Twice she repeated the cry. At last a little girl opened the door at the end of the passage.

"Come 'ere!" Mrs. Randal exclaimed peremptorily.

Well knowing what was expected of her, the child sidled towards them.

"What time did 'e come in this afternoon?" she was asked.

"'Arf-past four," was the prompt reply, with a voice that was her mother's in a higher octave.

"And who was with 'im?"

"The barmaid from the 'Three Crowns.'"

Mrs. Randal looked expectantly at Nanno to see the effect of this dramatic announcement. Dramatic it still was to her, though she had heard it from the child's lips at least twenty times before. But Nanno only leaned up against the wall. Her breath did not come any the faster; her heart beat none the quicker. Mrs. Randal did not know the previous experiences which had inured her against the horribleness of such information. She had not guessed how little events, little circumstances, during the last two months, had been leading Nanno to the expectation of such a crisis. The knowledge that frequently, on her return in the evening, he had been taking more than he could stand in the way of alcohol; the remembrance of that night when he had not returned at all; these and a lot of other smaller facts had all combined to prepare her mind for the climax which she fully realized was inevitable. Now it had come. He had proved his utter worthlessness. He had shown the hopeless futility of their lives being continued together. But if Mrs. Randal had expected that the knowledge of it would shame

Nanno so that she could not raise her head, she was mistaken. It has been said before in this chapter that the truth in life to a woman who has been robbed of her powers of idealization is degrading. It had degraded Nanno. She felt no shame. In the eyes of God, where all marriages were made, this man was her husband; but so utterly had he made his existence separate from hers that she felt no disgrace in the evil that he did.

"My Gawd!—'aven't yer anything to say to that?" Mrs. Randal exclaimed, when she had watched Nanno's face in vain for some sign of feeling.

Nanno shook her head.

"What did he say to yer!" Mrs. Randal then continued in her examination of the child. "'Ow did 'e explain what 'e was doin' in the 'ouse with that——?"

"'E said, 'Is my wife in?' 'e says."

"Well——?"

"'No,' I says, 'she ain't.' 'Well, this 'ere,' he says, 'is a friend of 'ers, she's comin' in 'ere to wait till she comes in,' he says."

"Go on!" ejaculated Mrs. Randal, anxious to arrive at that part of the story where she herself had taken an active part.

"Well—they went upstairs then and I didn't see no more of 'em—'cept what I 'eard."

"What did yer 'ear?"

"Singin' and laughin'—same way as father sings on Saturday night."

Mrs. Randal dismissed her daughter with a well-directed blow, lest other domestic details might fall from the mouth of babes.

"Well—what d'yer think of that now?" she asked, when Annie had closed the kitchen door. "In my 'ouse, what 'as always 'ad the name of bein' 'ighly respectable.

Singin' and laughin'—drunk they were. When I come back, the place was like a music-'all. I don't want to 'urt your feelin's. God in 'evin knows, we women 'ave to put up with a deal more than we oughter. But when I come in and Annie told me what was a-goin' on upstairs well, I just crep' up to the door and, God forgive me that I should be tellin' yer"—Mrs. Randal just gloried in the telling—"but I've always said as 'ow you were a cut above 'im. Well—I crep' up to the door and as shure as I'm standin' 'ere I 'eard 'im lovey-doveyin' 'er. I didn't go in. I've got some sense of decency, I 'ave. No —I didn't go in—I knocked at the door. 'Will yer come outside 'ere, Mr. Ryan?' I says; and then the singin' stopped, like as if I'd clapped me 'and on their mouths. After a minute the door opened an' 'e came out. Well— Gawd knows I don't want to be exageratin', my dear—but 'e was drunk—filthy—'e was. I didn't say nuffin'—I just went downstairs, out of the 'ouse, an' I got a policeman —one as I knows myself on 'is beat. Well—I won't repeat the langwidge 'e used"—she lifted her hands and her eyes towards heaven, represented by a dirty ceiling. "Anyway," she concluded, "'e's in Bow Street now, where you can see 'im if you like."

To all this story Nanno had said nothing. With her head against the varnished yellow paper of the wall, she listened to it all, as the picture of a dead man might listen to the importunate cries of his living wife. Mrs. Randal waited for a few moments after she had finished, to see whether Nanno had anything to reply, then she came to the gist of what she wanted to say.

"I'm sorry to 'ave to do it," she said, wiping the perspiration from her face, "but I'm afraid I shall 'ave to ask yer to find lodgin's elsewhere. When the street gets to 'ear of this I shall lose my reputation, and it'll take

me some time to get it back again, 'less I can say as 'ow I packed yer horff—d'yer see."

Nanno looked at her.

"I'll go up and pack my things," she said unemotionally.

"Well you needn't go to-night," said Mrs. Randal.

"I'm going at once," Nanno replied.

BOOK V.

THE UNLIFTED HAND.

CHAPTER I.

THE laws of Traffic are inexorable. The business of life cannot come to a standstill for this horse that falls dead between the shafts or for that driver that drops in death from his seat. Move on—move on—is the continual cry, and the rumble of all the vehicles in the world is incessant. Should a horse fall, or a driver drop the reins, will the Traffic stop? Never. Around the obstacle that bars its way, the ever-flowing stream will bifurcate with the inevitable precision of the mill-race that is divided by the fallen branch. Sometimes a passenger in passing will look down at the silent body and the rigid legs; others will turn away, preferring not to be reminded of the fate that awaits them farther down the road; but no one ever stops; the Traffic surges on. In a few hours that purchaser of the dead will come from nowhere with his cart. The body will be lifted on to the ready board. The driver will whip up his horse with a jest—his horse that, maybe, carrying the dead, will fall between the shafts itself—and the cart will rumble back to nowhere from whence it came, with its freight of death; the protruding head wagging aimlessly, the stiffened legs jolting like two sticks. Then the Traffic will pass on over the same spot, and the mark of what happened there will be gone forever.

What if the Traffic become congested? What if the crowd surge into one spot, the wheels be interlocked and,

at a cross roads, prevent the progress of those coming in another direction? What then?

There, at those corners in Life, you will find one, who, in his uniform of the law, controls the Traffic in his charge. There are many such corners to be met with, and many wear the uniform of power. By the raising of his hand or the nodding of his head he can let this vehicle pass on, and delay that at his will. He obeys a great design, but the discretion that he uses is his own.

Then to what type of man is given such colossal right? Is he part human, part divine? Does the great despot for whom he works instil into him some of his own omniscience? No. He is as much a man as that carter who, being allowed to pass on by the motioning hand, turns in his seat and jeers at those delayed behind. He is as human as that.

Supposing, then, his discretion be wrong? Supposing his judgment at fault? From one day to another he may direct the Traffic right; yet, in a moment, he might cast into utter destruction this vehicle or that which must obey his will. What is the whole of Traffic to such a vehicle, when its own destruction is wrought by his unyielding hand?

There is no answer.

The stream still swells on its flood. The wheels still grind; the whips still crack. You must be driven into the wall of damnation in order that those of your neighbors may pass by unscathed. But what is that to you? There is a voice that answers out of the East—"It is the law."

* * * * * * *

For the second time, Nanno left her husband. Her

life was her own, she argued; and, if she might not do with it as she wished, the liberty to dissociate it with that which was degrading at least remained with her.

Jamesy had never questioned where she worked. She had never told him. So long as she had brought back with her the substance of his living, he did not mind. It had not interested him. When therefore she returned to the old rooms in the Fulham Road, going as usual each day to the restaurant, she knew that she was free from discovery. In the labyrinths of London she was certain that it would be impossible for one of his experience to penetrate into her seclusion, and she felt sure that when he was free he would return to Ireland, well knowing that, in leaving no clue to her whereabouts, she had taken her life into her own hands as she had done before.

The relief of being once again by herself and in the place which held only the happiest of her recollections was continually present with her. She decorated her room just as it had been before. The same picture of the Sacred Heart she hung on its nail—which had never been removed—over the bed. With only herself to support, her circumstances seemed suddenly to have assumed an affluence that was like the realization of a dream of wealth. She put money away at meager interest in the Post Office Savings Bank; and Mrs. Hudson, always having an affection for her because of the quietness of her living and her gentle voice, welcomed her back as though she were a child of her own.

Of Jerningham, she saw nothing. He had gone out of her life, and all that she retained of him was the letter which she had received at the restaurant. She dared not go and see him again. This second catastrophe had weakened her determination to obey, and she knew that if she were once more to come into the atmosphere of his

influence, she could not maintain the strength that she had shown before.

But life was incomparably happier than it had been. There was no fear to be felt in the returning home. Mrs. Hudson always had a comfortable meal prepared for her. She gave her back the possession of the latchkey; that same, heavy weight of metal which began again to wear the holes in her pocket.

When the first tremble of anticipation that at any turn of a street she might meet Jamesy had worn away, she settled down to a more contented outlook on life. There was time for reading again. Her Saturday afternoons and her Sundays were once more holidays, not days of penance and terror. And with this growing feeling of negative happiness, she knew that she had done right in pursuing the course which she had adopted.

Even at this hour, there was left the hope of making amends in her life for all the wretchedness and disappointment that had preceded it; but her destiny as yet had not begun the weaving of its last pattern on the loom.

Five weeks after her departure from Jamesy, the hand of nature fastened about her with its unerring grip. As one day followed another, she felt its fingers sinking deeper and deeper into the humanity of her flesh. Then, when all hope had been choked, when realization had donned the black cap of certainty, she knew that she was to be a mother once more. The curse of Eve had pursued her, overtaking her just as her steps were free, just as she saw before her the silent, far-stretching road of content.

Then the horizon altered. The faint gray of a peaceful sky was swept with ugly clouds. She saw nothing but the hopeless inevitability of the storm through which she knew she must pass; and what lay on the other side

was totally obscured in the shadow of that which was gathering around her.

When first she realized it, she lay on her bed, her face buried in the pillows and the hot tears soaking into their texture. For a while she raged against it, crying importunately as will a child who has been denied its dearest wish. The last five weeks seemed unsurpassable in their happiness, compared to what awaited her. If the thought of appealing to Jamesy in her trouble ever entered her head, it was with a shudder of repugnance and disgust. The fact that it was his child as well as her own had no place in her reasoning. She felt she was utterly alone.

Then she sat up, her hair disheveled about her face and stared before her at nothing. Her eyes smarted with their tears. Her lips felt swollen and her face burning to her forehead. But she seemed unconscious of everything. After a few moments she rose and paced the room, going to the mirror on the dressing-table and looking for some minutes at her face without realizing how piteous she seemed.

At last a desperate hope that she might be wrong, she might have made a mistake, cheered her. She dried her eyes, making up her mind to wait.

The hope yielded nothing. When a few more weeks had passed, during which she had striven to occupy her thoughts with other things, the truth was forced upon her. The same scene occurred once more and, passing through the sitting-room by her door, Mrs. Hudson heard the sounds of her passionate weeping.

Hesitating for a moment, she at last opened the door and looked in.

"Why, my goodness!" she exclaimed, coming forward.

Nanno sat up hurriedly and tried to dry her eyes.

"What hever's the matter?"

Nanno shook her head. "Nothing," she said weakly.

Mrs. Hudson was not prepared to be satisfied with that. She crossed the room and stood in front of her with her hands on her massive hips.

"What's been 'appenin' to yer?" she persisted.

Nanno shook her head again, but said nothing. She tried to rise to her feet and pass by Mrs. Hudson to the dressing-table, but the landlady laid her hands on her shoulder—she was not afraid of trouble. She would admit, quite openly, to any one in the most casual conversation that she had had her share of it. And with Nanno, she felt interested; which is a kinder way of saying that a woman is curious. There was not a great deal of life that she had not seen from her point of view, and she knew by unconscious experience that a girl does not cry when there is no one to see or to affect unless she has very serious reasons for it. She was, moreover, with her knowledge of the world, quite prepared to guess what those reasons were, and in her own way, which, when handled by a woman, is wonderfully efficacious, she proceeded to do so.

"I guess that Mr. Mossop 'as been worrying yer again," she began—"I never did like the looks of 'im when 'e came 'ere that Sunday. He ain't the best type of man because 'e's under a silk 'at. A brother o' mine was a hundertaker and wore a top 'at most days of 'is life; but 'e was the biggest blackguard I hever saw. It is Mr. Mossop—isn't it?" she added cunningly, fully believing that it was not. "When first you told me 'e was hover you in the restaurant, I said to my 'usband—'Jest you wait and see,' I says. Now, what's 'e been doin'?"

Nanno shook the tears from her eyes.

"Oh, nothing!" she exclaimed vehemently. "It has nothing to do with Mr. Mossop."

Mrs. Hudson nodded her head satisfactorily. This was one possibility eliminated from those which she had in her mind. If it was not Mr. Mossop, then the suggestion that it was the other visitor, whose name she had forgotten, might find an echo or induce her to tell the real truth. She was firmly convinced that a man lay beneath it all. She knew men thoroughly. She had married one.

With a few tentative preliminaries then, she made the second suggestion, and this Nanno refuted as emphatically as the first.

"But there is some man?" Mrs. Hudson declared, for a moment at a loss. "Come now," she continued in a motherly tone of voice—"'as 'e jilted yer—'as 'e—'as 'e?"

Nanno remained silent and, with a subtle intuition, knowing that the girl would admit such a position when asked with such kindness as Mrs. Hudson had shown, she arrived with a sudden bound of her imagination in the region of the truth.

"'As 'e got yer into trouble?" she asked in a whisper—"'as 'e got yer into trouble and then 'ooked off?"

Nanno buried her head again in the pillow. The knowledge that in another moment she would be compelled, from the sheer desire to ease her mind, to tell Mrs. Hudson everything, completely overcame her.

The landlady stood erect for a moment, as though to take breath after her exertion. She knew that she had found the kernel of it all; the same poor withered fruit that lies within nearly every shell of despair and remorse, with which so many women's lives are clothed. She shook her head as she looked at Nanno's body, convulsing with the sobs that were shaking her from head to foot.

"And 'e won't marry yer—eh—isn't that it, 'e won't marry yer?"

"I am married!" Nanno exclaimed suddenly, in her

own defense—"I am married!" she repeated, and her words were muffled with the pillow at her mouth.

"You are married?" Mrs. Hudson cried. "Well, my Gawd! 'ow you do surprise me. What are yer cryin' about then?"

Nanno told her everything.

CHAPTER II.

If there is ever a time when Life can be said to be like a man in whose footsteps death follows, running when he runs, walking when he walks, stopping when he stops; then, during the next few months, Life was as that to Nanno.

The hour would come, she knew, when she would require every penny that she could scrape together. The determination, then, to save everything that she could spare, was a natural consequence. But there was as yet another point for consideration. As soon as her condition became apparent, she knew that she would be dismissed from the restaurant. Then, for the time being at least and until her child was born, she could not hope to obtain another situation. How long dared she take the risk in order to save the sum which she considered necessary? Affluent though her circumstances had seemed to be when first she came back to the Fulham Road, they now appeared in a very different light. Ten shillings or twelve at the utmost saved every week will not accumulate in a few months to anything of importance. But the eternal hope that she was true to her faith and that therein lay the help that she most needed, persuaded her to trust the God of Providence too implicitly.

One day she found the superintendent's glance criticizing her. The cold eyes were fixed on her. An ill-bred relentlessness lay like a shadow on her face. Nanno felt the blood running like cold water through her veins. With

the first opportunity that offered, she hurried to the attendants' dressing-room, and with pathetic attitudes studied herself in the glass.

She had trusted too much. She had been deceived by hope and the desire to be earning money as long as possible. The tears came quietly into her eyes when she thought of the twenty pounds or so that she had put away in the Savings Bank. For some weeks to come she knew that she would be unable to earn any more. And how long would twenty pounds last? Only a few weeks —no longer.

When the day was over, Mr. Mossop called her aside. She followed him with her head erect.

"I'm sorry to tell you, Miss Troy," he said, in a tone of righteousness, "that we shall not require your services any longer. You will be given a week's wages and your place will be filled to-morrow."

Nanno put her hand to her eyes.

"Can I have a recommendation that will help me in getting another situation?" she asked.

"Most decidedly not," he replied. In his voice lay the just indignation of the entire firm. She had favored another as she had refused to favor him, and mercy was not within call of him.

Nanno looked up with pleading eyes.

"Oh, surely you can't deny me that?" she begged.

"We have every right. I may say that such a case as this has never occurred amongst our young ladies before. Your condition is a disgrace to the establishment and to yourself." Mr. Mossop could be a moralist if he chose. Half expressed in the back of his mind, there lay quite a few stinging phrases of ethical judgment which he was yearning to deliver to this girl who had so wantonly

given herself away; but they would not collect themselves into forms of speech.

"I repeat," he added in lieu of them—"it is a disgrace."

"But I am married," Nanno replied quietly. "I didn't know that it was a disgrace for a married woman to work for her living as long as she is able."

Mr. Mossop saw the truth in her eyes, but he refused to believe it. This would rob him of prestige. It offended his sense of mastery. Besides, where was her husband?

"If you wish to profess that," he answered, "I am forced to reply that we do not employ married women on our staff. You will receive your wages from the cashier in the usual way."

"But the letter of recommendation?"

He looked her squarely in the face, as though, with the astuteness of the barrister, he were putting her to a test that would expose the weakness of her story.

"If you like to bring your husband here and with the certificate of your marriage I will endeavor, for the sake of the interest I once took in you, to see how far I can influence the firm to look at your case with reasonable leniency. Will you do that? Will you bring your husband here?"

"I can't."

"Ah!" He smiled with the wisdom of the world and the weight of his own omniscience. "Isn't he alive?" He asked it so gently, so considerately.

"Yes—he's alive."

"Oh—then why can't you bring him?"

"We don't live together."

"Ah." The smile returned with reassurance. "I see—you don't live together. Then—good-afternoon."

He left her there alone.

When four months had passed her child was born. Mrs. Hudson in those days rose to a pinnacle of admiration and affection in Nanno's heart. She nursed her through it all with a care and attention that no mother could have excelled. "Why, my goodness," she said, expressing her view of the whole matter, "so long as they leave them words—'for better or for worse'—in the prayer-books, this state o' things'll be goin' hon, goin' hon, and what's to stop 'em?"

When she learned that Nanno had but very little money left in the hoard which she had saved, she replied that there was time enough to talk about them things when she couldn't pay at all.

"Why Lord a' mercy," she added, going to the door, "a fine young girl like you will get somefin' to do the moment you put your foot outside the door again. And that'll be in just ten days from now. I'll pack yer off then; like as if yer was goin' to school."

Nanno smiled. She tried to laugh, but the sound broke in her throat, and the moment the door had closed, her head was buried in the pillows and the tears rushed from her eyes as a stream that is in flood. She made no sound. She was too weak. But beside her, in all the lustiness of new life, Jamesy's child asserted its existence.

In ten days, as Mrs. Hudson had declared, Nanno was about once more, and the first morning that she was strong enough, she set out to answer the advertisements that she had been watching in the papers. They were all for situations such as that which she had filled at Maynard's, but without exception needed proofs of her experience. She could give none.

The days passed by, and one evening after another she returned, her errands fruitless. Her circumstances when she first came from Ireland were far superior to those

which she cited now. She had had experience; she was more fitted for her work, but some shadow seemed to have fallen across her face. It fell across the story that she told. They looked at her suspiciously. When Mr. Mossop had first seen her, she had been so obviously the fresh, country girl, ready to learn, ready to work. That suggestion had left her now. There was no doubt that she had been in London for some time. Then what had she been doing? She could not answer. If she had not been at work, were there any persons who could recommend her for honesty, sobriety—any of the moral qualifications that all these establishments are so eager to get and so lax to superintend? But there were none. There was one perhaps—Jerningham—but she would not go to him. And so the days turned into weeks. She was already heavily in Mrs. Hudson's debt, but no work was to be found.

One evening she was having a meal, when the door of the sitting-room opened and Mr. Hudson, whom she had often seen, but never spoken to before, entered the room.

"Excuse me," he began awkwardly.

"Why—of course. Please come in."

He shut the door ominously behind him.

"It's like this," he said, striding like a cart-horse at once to his point: "my missis is lettin' you lodge 'ere for nothin'."

"Oh, as soon as I get work, Mr. Hudson——"

"Yes—as soon as you do. So far you 'aven't got it, so what I'm sayin' ain't so far wrong. She's lettin' you lodge 'ere for nothin', and we can't afford it—blowed if we can. If she knew I was talkin' to you about it, she'd go 'arf ways to breakin' me 'ead—so you needn't tell her, d'yer see——"

Nanno said she understood.

"Well, now, what are yer goin' to do? I tells you we can't afford it, and what do you reply?"

"It shan't continue. I shall say nothing to Mrs. Hudson; you needn't be afraid of that—but it shan't continue."

He went to the door again.

"Much obliged," he said lethargically. Then he was gone. A few sentences, a few moments, and the real tragedy of her position had been shown to her, as when a search-light, scouring like a greyhound through the dark, falls with its dazzling illumination upon its prey. He had come and gone, before she was almost aware of his entrance; yet it had been long enough to change the entire outlook in her mind.

A pound or so was all that she possessed in the world and, so far as she could see, only one course lay open to her—to appeal to Jerningham. She took his crumpled letter out of her pocket and read it through again. She had lost count by this of the number of times that she had perused it.

"I don't know the laws of your Church—but I suppose that that would be a greater sin. I could not make you sin, Nanno. You are only meant for the praise and pleasure of the God who made you. And so I see I am wrong even in saying that I would take you in should you come and ask me. I would not take you in. I would not."

It was quite obvious that he did not know the laws of her Church. It would be a sin, no doubt, if she sought the cover and release of his protection; but absolution would not be denied her. There were many women who sinned in such a way to whom absolution was granted. The punishment would not be so drastic as the inevitable excommunication that would follow her marriage, were she to accept the law of England. He did not know the

laws of her Church; but could she enlighten him? Could she go down to the Temple that evening and say, "I'm in great trouble; I can't support myself or my child. If I came to live with you, it would not be so great sin as if I wilfully disobeyed the teachings of the Church and married you—will you take me?"

How could she say that? It would be selling herself —worse than selling herself. She would be taking advantage of the love he felt for her, and receiving more, infinitely more, than was her due. It would be a better thing to go into the streets and barter with those who needed no more than she could give, rather than play on his feelings as on a man who was drunk and steal from him more than her rightful wage.

She shuddered when she thought of the stress of circumstance into which she had been brought. Two years ago, six months ago, this idea would never have entered her head; now she contemplated it as a possible alternative to something that appeared to be her last hope. The hand of the Law was raised warningly before her. When it was lowered, it seemed that she could only go on towards her own destruction. Why obey the Law? Those brought up beneath its hand find it well-nigh impossible to creep out of the shadow.

But what was there to do? She leaned on the table, her hands holding her head, that throbbed with the pulse of despair. The Fate that had been hanging in her steps across the checkered-board of Life had driven her into the fatal square. She could move neither to the right nor to the left. There remained only one black square and that, behind her. The law of Traffic compelled her to move on. Fate, Circumstance—there are so many names, yet none actually define the power that drives—offered only this way to move. Was it to be checkmate or one more

effort in a lower, meaner groove, from which the hope of ultimate escape was too remote to see?

Mrs. Hudson opened the door and looked in.

"'Ere's Miss Shand to see yer, dear. Miss Shand, what used to come before."

Nanno lifted her head with sudden hope. Was this a direction, an alternative that she had overlooked?

CHAPTER III.

HAD she known the subtle menace that was hidden behind the advent of Miss Shand—the poisoned dagger behind the velvet cloak—Nanno would have closed her door and cried against her entry. But the deeper design lay concealed beneath the superficial fact that this was a friend in a moment of distress. She welcomed her as a man welcomes the first blades of harvest that lift above the ground. In that instant it seemed that she had found her salvation.

So it is and in such a guise that the scheme of Life brings personalities together for its own ends, with its own intentions. It will scour the earth to fill one departing boat, weaving a network of circumstances, lasting sometimes over years, in order to collect these units on a certain night of storm when the ship shall be wrecked and they whose hour has come be sent before their God as the law of Fate has decided. It will bring together a man and a woman from the uttermost ends of the world, constructing an intricate scaffolding of events which, with a certainty that counts to a grain the sand that is washed of the sea, will make their contact inevitable. It will make lovers of them, friends of them, husband and wife of them, in order to create tribulation or blessing for them both. Thus the gauntlet of existence is run in order that they who are entered for the race may pass the test of tribulation or the yet harder test of blessings that can-

not be numbered, before it may be adjudged that they have earned their reward.

That evening, as Miss Shand was getting into the 'bus that would bring her to the flat where she had moved, she saw a girl crossing the road who reminded her of Nanno. That girl had been sent on a message from the City, and it was the first time for three years that she had come so far West. A moment later, a moment sooner, Miss Shand would not have seen her, and the thought of going out to the Fulham Road and renewing her friendship with Nanno would not have entered her head. But the incident was timed with an accuracy which nothing human can conceive. Miss Shand jumped down from her 'bus before it started; crossing to the other side of the street, she took another that was going in the direction that she required and, within twenty minutes, she was kissing Nanno's cheek with friendly assurances that their quarrel was over.

So these two, both unconscious of the fact that they were puppets in a powerful hand, met again to play their parts, one against the other, as unwittingly as they had done before.

Nanno seated Miss Shand in the old horsehair armchair, and, placing herself near her, they talked for an hour of the old times, of the changes that had come in the restaurant since Nanno's departure, on every topic that a woman—no matter what her training may have been—can call into immediate requisition in order to shield the one subject that is nearest her thoughts.

But eventually it had to be discussed. Both of them were fully aware of that. Whenever an opportunity offered, Miss Shand drew the conversation round to Nanno's dismissal from Maynard's and, for a time, Nanno deftly avoided the inevitable result. At length she gave way

and, with lips that sometimes quivered, with voice that sometimes shook, she told her story once more, her eyes fixed on the cold and empty grate as though, in its very cheerlessness, she found assistance in her confession.

With concentrated intentness, Miss Shand listened to every word; asking such questions now and again as would satisfy a curiosity regarding intimate details which she could not suppress.

"And now," concluded Nanno, "I can get nothing to do. For the last week or so I've been answering advertisements till the sight of a paper makes me feel tired—worn out."

"How much have you saved, dear?" asked Miss Shand, coming without hesitation to the vital point.

"All that I've saved is gone. I've only got a pound and a few shillings, and I owe Mrs. Hudson here quite a lot of money."

"But how about Mr. Jerningham? He'd help you—don't I just know he would."

Up to this moment Jerningham's name had not been mentioned. Nanno had steered wide of it as of a whirlpool, though just before her friend's arrival it had risen so prominently in her mind.

"How about Mr. Jerningham?" Miss Shand repeated. She knew that Nanno had intentionally avoided the introduction of his name. Now she intended to bring it in herself. It is a practical impossibility to shake a woman of a fixed belief which instinct has driven into her mind, and with Miss Shand, when first she heard the reason of Nanno's dismissal from the restaurant, her thoughts flew to Jerningham as the cause. Now she had been told a different story. Out of nowhere a husband had been created and offered for her acceptance as the father of Nanno's child. But where was the father now? He had

vanished again into the nowhere from whence he came. When first she had known Nanno, she had found her living alone in these very rooms. No hint, no suggestion, was ever given then that she was married. Now, after some months, she had returned to find Nanno the mother of a child, but still living alone as she was before. With preconceived ideas as to the child's parentage, founded on no idle conjectures, she was asked then to believe in a husband who, in that short time, had come from and gone into the unknown.

Nanno was reticent; by nature, Miss Shand knew that she was a great deal more virtuous than many another girl of her acquaintance, who had not come to such a pass as this. It was quite reasonable to suppose that she did not like to tell the actual truth. But more forcible a reason than this, was the first conviction that had entered like a sun-ray into the unillumined mind of Miss Shand, that Jerningham was the father of Nanno's child. She would not dare openly to say so. A generous consideration of Nanno's feelings was mostly the cause of this. But in her heart, she nursed the belief—judged by it—worked on it. Why wasn't Jerningham helping her? For the third time she asked the question:

"How about Mr. Jerningham?"

"Why do you keep on asking that?" said Nanno, brought at last to the actual discussion of his existence. "Mr. Jerningham has nothing to do with me. We used to be friends, perhaps, but because she's his friend, a woman can't go and ask a man to help her with money."

Miss Shand opened her eyes.

"Why not? He'd be only too glad."

"I don't think so. He wouldn't like it. I'm nothing to him. I'd rather we didn't speak about him. What you suggest is right out of the question." She leaned

forward and laid her hand on Miss Shand's. "Don't speak about him any more," she pleaded.

It had been said that Miss Shand was by no means the worst of her type. She had not been brought up to understand the full meaning of the word morality, but that did not lessen the power of the better impulses that were often ready to dominate her actions. She could not withstand this appeal, as Nanno made it. Still believing that Jerningham was the cause af all the misfortune that had beset her companion, she felt the utmost compassion for her in this plight, which, in her own mind, she chose to call desertion. Gripping with convulsive pressure the hand that was laid on hers, she put one arm round Nanno's neck.

"I'll never so much as breathe his name again!" she exclaimed; "but if he won't help you—I will. You pack up your things here. Tell Mrs. Hudson you'll pay her as soon as you can, and then you'll just come and live with me till you can get some work to do—eh, dear?"

Nanno's gratitude filled her eyes.

"How can I?" she said. "You couldn't afford it in your rooms."

"Ah!—but I've a flat of my own now."

"You have?"

"Yes—so that it'll be only your food that'll cost anything, and I know how to do things cheap. I should just think I did."

"But there's the baby."

For the moment both of them had forgotten the first cause of all the trouble.

"And I've never seen him—is it a him?"

Nanno nodded.

"Where is he?"

"Sleeping in my bedroom."

But three weeks passed by and that independence was still unfound. She did her utmost during this time to minimize the cost of her living and, as a result, the baby suffered in its strength. She suffered too Her cheeks that once were full and tinted with the open air, as when Jerningham had first seen her, found hollows and grew paler every day. Her deep eyes burned just as brightly, but there were heavy shadows under them. Her lips were just as beautiful. They looked, in fact, a deeper red against the ivory pallor of her face.

She seemed more fragile than ever. The expression of Fatefulness had increased. No one, looking at her with sight that was anything at all more than superficial, could fail to think that in some man's life she would be the heaven of a great passion or the hell of a giant despair. It did not escape the notice of Miss Shand. Often, when silently looking at her in the evening when she returned, she would wonder why Nanno had so spoiled her life. Whether it was, as she still believed, the fault of Jerningham, or, as Nanno would wish her to understand, the existence of this unknown husband, still her life was spoiled, and with the undeniable beauty of her face, Miss Shand was fully aware that the conditions under which she lived might have been very different.

She never expressed this thought. A woman must love another more deeply than Miss Shand loved Nanno to tell her that she is beautiful. And Nanno was not of that type of woman which knows its beauty for itself. Regarding herself in the glass when she went to bed, she would realize how tired she looked. Never, even with Jerningham, had she counted upon her appearance. She had often wondered why he should love her as he had declared. He had never told her that she was beautiful. Had he done so, she might then have believed it for his eyes alone.

It is the women who are pretty, who know of their own grace and think themselves beautiful. The beauty of a beautiful woman is not to be found by herself when she sees her reflection in a mirror; half of it lies in the minds of those who find her fair.

It was after three weeks of quiet living, chatting with her friend after supper, while she made minute little garments for her child, and working like a housemaid during the day, that Miss Shand returned early one evening with the information that she wanted to get a swell meal ready.

"I've got some fellows—nice chaps—coming in to-night, dear—that's why."

They busied themselves about the room to improve the superficial appearance of things, which means so much to a woman and so little to a man. The expectation of company brought a glow of excitement to Nanno's cheeks. She had never met any of Miss Shand's friends and, in the generous innocence of her heart, she anticipated a pleasurable relief from the monotony of listening to her companion's amiable conversation.

"Now, you go and put on the best frock you've got, dear," Miss Shand advised, when they had spread an enticing meal from the parcels which she had brought back with her. "I'm going to put on a low body what one of the girls in Maynard's got for me cheap. It's a bargain, really it is. I've seen some in Regent Street in Peter Robinson's—not a bit better.

Nanno departed to her room with a lighter step.

"I do hope the baby won't cry out in your room to-night, dear," Miss Shand called after her. "It 'ud be so awkward like if they was to hear it."

Nanno stopped. She felt plainly the note of objection in her friend's voice. Those first ecstasies of Miss Shand had soon died away when she had come to live with the

child. Nanno had seen that before. Now it was still more obvious and once again, for a time that was past counting, she whispered a hurried appeal to the Power above her that she might soon find employment.

"I'll see that it goes fast asleep," she called back.

Whatever belief there may be, prayer is the essence of religion. It is a greater and deeper and truer acknowledgment of the existence and mercy of God than any purchased seat in the parish church. Nanno's unswerving belief in the teachings of her creed was no less wonderful than her deep-rooted feeling of reverence and dependence upon the God she worshiped. Scarcely a day passed when, apart from the usual prayers of night and morning, she did not whisper an importunate appeal to the Throne of her Creator. She did it as she worked. She did it as she passed along the street. There was no one sufficiently observant to mark the surreptitiously moving finger as it made the sign of the Cross in preliminary to the prayer.

That evening, no sooner had she closed the door of her room than she went to the bed and knelt down, praying for patience, praying for help—however it might come.

When she came back into the sitting-room, Miss Shand was already dressed. The bargain that she wore, suited her certainly, if it did fulfil to the letter the fact that it was low. She looked up with the expectation of approval in her eyes; but when she saw Nanno, who for the last few weeks had worn nothing but her oldest clothes in which to do the work of the house, arrayed in a dainty though unpretentious muslin frock which she had once bought for the summer, the look of expectation departed from her eyes.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed, "I didn't know you had that thing!" She half closed her eyes critically. "Yes—I think it does suit you, dear," she added. To an

outsider the lie would have been obvious. Miss Shand knew that Nanno looked infinitely preferable to herself. But this was not the moment for praise.

At half-past seven the fellows arrived. There were only two of them. Miss Shand was not without discretion when considering her own interests.

To introduce them as they were, Stanley Puckle and Wilfrid Aimes were both in business. As a solicitor's clerk in Bedford Row, the former, dressed in the neighborhood of Eastcheap on approved patterns from West End tailors, was the discontented recipient of one hundred and seventy-five pounds a year. He lived in lodgings quite close to the suburban end of the Two-penny Tube, and when he went up to business in the morning, a flower of the previous night's entertainment usually graced his button-hole. Wilfrid Aimes, on the other hand, was of a diametrically opposite mold. When Stanley Puckle talked loudly of musical-comedy artistes and repeated jokes which he had heard across the footlights from those creatures of genius, his friend was mutely silent. When, on the other hand, Wilfrid Aimes discussed the beauties of Shelley and the more intelligible portions of George Meredith, Stanley Puckle held his tongue and waited for an opening.

Wilfrid Aimes was a designer for the artistic productions of a firm of electricians in the West. The firm of electricians, though full of hesitation in backing their opinion of him in the form of the salary they gave were, nevertheless, emphatically aware of the value of his services. He had a little office to himself—called the Designing Room, with two capital letters—and from there he despatched neat little paintings on colored paper of electroliers and wall-light fittings, which never looked the same when the actual ornament was complete. He pleased the customers however, frequently inducing them to buy fittings that

they did not require, and his designs in antique copper were like nothing that the trade could produce. In the district of Portland Street Station, he had secured a couple of top rooms and there, with no possible hope of success, he painted studies in his non-working hours—studies in black and white, studies in crayons, studies in cheap German oils—with the expectation that he would ultimately rise to fame. By this means he supplemented something to his income; but he was belonging to that class of Bohemian artists who live with a woman and, when they have painted her features on more canvasses than they can afford, never having really caught her likeness or made a picture, grow tired of her and search for another. The stability that succeeds was not to be found in his composition. At heart he was infinitely preferable to his friend; but the stamp of Bohemianism debarred him from much of the appreciation which fell to the lot of Stanley Puckle. Stanley Puckle was a man of the world; he knew what was going on at the theaters; Wilfrid Aimes had "artist" written across the unstarched limpness of his collar, and he only knew nothing about Meredith, Shelley, and the rest—and of what use was that?

Here then are the two fellows, the nice chaps, the two friends of Miss Shand—introduced as they were. As she introduced them to Nanno, they became "My friend, Mr. Puckle." Mr. Puckle raised Nanno's hand to the level of his shoulder and wagged it familiarly. "How d'you do," he said. He had a special tone of voice for conversing with women.

"Mr. Aimes," went on Miss Shand; "he's an artist, dear, paints divinely."

Mr. Aimes bowed.

"Nothing in this world is divine," he said epigrammatically; then he looked up, met Nanno's eyes and felt

persuaded to add an amendment to his statement. He thought he had never seen such eyes, such hair, or such lips before. For the rest of the evening he was mixing burnt umber upon the palette of his mind and painting her hair on the canvas of his imagination. Many a woman's face had been portrayed there before. He merely rubbed the pictures out and painted over them.

Before the meal was commenced, it became evident to Nanno that Mr. Puckle, with his well-oiled hair, his latest thing in ties and the suggestion of lavender-water that clung about him, was Miss Shand's more especial friend. They drifted away into a corner of the room together and she was left to converse with Mr. Aimes. Had she particularly felt any preference, this would have been her choice. At least he was no fop. His intelligence was of a higher order than that of Stanley Puckle's. Of course he talked about his art; but then, on first acquaintance, she found the topic interesting. And all the time his eyes wandered from her lips to her eyes, her eyes to her hair, then back again to commence their journey of obvious admiration once more. Nanno was not exactly sorry when Miss Shand asked her to see if the meal was ready.

When everything was prepared, they sat down to the table and the conversation became general. Nanno joined in the laughter that ensued. For the first time for some months she felt in excellent spirits.

"Delicious trifle this," said Mr. Puckle, looking up from a spoonful of the sweet that he was just raising to his mouth. Six-pennyworth of sherry had gone to the making of that dish. Miss Shand felt flattered at the remark.

"I always like it flavored with sherry," she said. "Will you have another help?"

Mr. Puckle with alacrity said he would.

"I remember when I was staying down at Hastings,"

he remarked, bearing away a well-filled plate, "they had excellent trifle at the hotel where I was staying. I asked the head waiter what wine they used."

"Sherry, of course," interposed Miss Shand.

"Yes—sherry. Oh! they do you very well at that place. Quite reasonable too. I only had to pay four guineas a week while I was there. Some of the actors and actresses in one of the musical comedies were staying there as well. That proves, of course, that the place was up to the mark. You won't catch them going to the inferior hotels. Very decent lot they were too. What musical comedy? Oh—the 'Orchid.' Jolly good—did you see it?"

Miss Shand shook her head.

"Did you, Miss Troy?"

Nanno replied in the negative.

"Oh—clever thing!" he assured them. "Very smart, you know. There was one joke, this man wanted to get a certain orchid you know"—he leaned over the table and continued the relation of it to Miss Shand.

"Did you ever sit for your portrait, Miss Troy?" Aimes asked, turning to Nanno.

She looked up at him and laughed brightly.

"For my portrait? No—never. Don't you have to pay for that?"

"Well—it all depends." He hesitated. He was thinking of what he would pay to get her to sit to him.

"I wouldn't charge to paint yours."

"Oh, but why should you?"

"Because I should like to. You've got the type of face that is full of inspiration to a man of my temperament. When I feel a thing I must paint it. I don't feel I'm existing until I get a brush in my hand. It's just temperament of course; I'm cursed with the artistic temperament."

"But why should you call it a curse? Isn't it nice to feel you must do a thing and then be able to do it."

"There is that way of looking at it," Aimes admitted. "But I'm afraid I'm no good, Miss Troy. I talk about the artistic temperament, and when I say I'm cursed with it, I mean that I don't think I'm any good."

"Why do you want to paint me then?"

"Because I believe I could make a picture. Might get into the Royal Academy, you know. I have seen some rotters in there from time to time. I believe I could make a picture."

The poor man had believed this with every other woman he had been attracted to.

"Would you ever come and sit for me?" he begged. "I'd pay you as they do a model, you know; because why should I take up your time for nothing?"

He would pay her. She would earn some money; well earned if it helped him to paint a picture that might get into the Royal Academy. But it would be money with which she could pay Mrs. Hudson; with which she could, in some part, remove her obligations from Miss Shand. She was hungering for the independence wrought of gold.

"Say you'll come," he repeated eagerly, seeing the half consent already in her face.

"Yes—I'll come," she said—"if you really do think you want me as a model—I'll come; but I don't want you to do it out of kindness."

Why did she use that word "kindness"? Was it not more her kindness to him; even if he did pay her?

"Are you sure you do really want to paint my picture?" she persisted.

"Well—I have only to look at you," he said—and he did look at her. She might have known then that it was not her picture that he wanted; yet how could she know, when

his enthusiasm even deceived himself? He had wanted to paint so many women, and it had usually ended in the same way. He took them from the class where such an ending would be possible. Yet he never succeeded in seeing through himself. The inclination to make a picture always deceived him. Perhaps it was true; he was cursed with the artistic temperament. But any temperament can be a curse, just as is life itself. The whole matter depends upon how one uses it; whether it sways the man or the man becomes its master. It ruled Wilfrid Aimes as a wife rules a husband; permitting him to think that he was its tyrant, yet driving him precisely where it willed.

"When shall I come, then?" Nanno asked.

"It'll have to be in the evenings," he told her. "When I've finished business."

They made the arrangement then for the first sitting, and when after a while they came to a pause of silence, Mr. Puckle's voice attracted their attention. He was confiding to Miss Shand the difficulties he was experiencing in regaining some money that he had lent to a friend.

"Of course, I spurned to take an IOU from a friend," he explained. "I wouldn't do such a thing. But I don't want to be done."

"Didn't he give you a receipt or anything?" she asked.

"No—that's the worst of it. I ought to have paid him with a check, but when you're not very well known—you know what I mean—people ask questions about your checks, and I detest that. I've treated him as decently as I possibly can. I've written and written, but I can't afford to keep him in luxury. When I look over my bank-book and see the amounts I've lent him, it makes me absolutely furious. You remember Turner, don't you, Aimes?"

Mr. Aimes admitted that he did.

"Well, he's never paid me back that money I lent him.

I shall cut him now if I see him in the street. I would too if I were you. Oh, of course, the man's not a gentleman."

"Can't be," Miss Shand agreed.

Later on in the evening whisky and a syphon of soda were produced. Nanno noticed at a still later period that Mr. Puckle's arm, which had been lying on the back of Miss Shand's chair, was now round her waist. The laughter that burst forth at various intervals sounded strange and hysterical. At last Nanno rose and said that she would retire.

"Oh, don't go to bed yet!" exclaimed Miss Shand.

"No, please don't," echoed Mr. Puckle.

Mr. Aimes looked at her mutely.

"I'm very tired," she said, apologetically. "Of course, I'll stay if you wish it."

"Well, we don't want to force you, dear—don't think that. Do we?" Miss Shand appealed to the others.

Mr. Puckle emphatically said "No!" Mr. Aimes shook his head wistfully.

Then Nanno bid them good-night, and when she had gone, leaving Mr. Aimes inconsolably alone, Miss Shand settled down more comfortably into Mr. Puckle's embrace.

"She's a strange mixture," she remarked.

Mr. Aimes looked round with interest.

"Why do you say that?" he asked.

"Well, look here. You must promise both of you to say nothing. You're both friends of mine, otherwise of course I wouldn't breathe a word. It's not the sort of thing I like to go telling people about others' private affairs. Have you ever heard me?" She appealed more particularly to Stanley Puckle, and that gentleman more particularly endeavored to reply by an attempt to kiss her.

"You mustn't do that!" she exclaimed petulantly.

"Well, that girl used to be at Maynard's restaurant with me, where I am now."

"Is she a musician then?" asked Mr. Puckle.

"No—she waited. Well, there was a man that used to come up to see her. Oh, he was really a gentleman. One evening I met him up in her rooms, and when I went home he came back with me. That was when I was living in Gray's Inn Road."

"He came back with you, eh?" inquired Mr. Puckle.

"Oh, only to the door. I think he'd have liked—however, that's nothing to do with you—is it?" She looked up coquettishly into her admirer's face. "Well, he told me then that he was gone on her—Nanno, I mean—Miss Troy—and some time after then she was dismissed from Maynard's."

"Why?" Mr. Aimes asked abruptly.

Miss Shand assumed the most decorous of maiden modesty. "Well, if you must know," she said, endeavoring to find blushes and striving to hide them, "she was in the family way."

Wilfrid Aimes put his hand over his eyes.

"Well?" said Mr. Puckle, settling himself closer to Miss Shand.

"Well, I guessed of course; but about four weeks ago—this was some months after she had been dismissed—I went down to her old rooms and found her there with her baby. She hadn't got anything fresh to do. She hadn't had any work in fact for some months. She hadn't a penny—she owed eight pounds to her landlady. She was practically starving herself—the child'll never live long after those first few months of its life—and so I took her in here, and she's been here ever since."

"By Jove, that was awfully decent of you, you know!" Mr. Puckle exclaimed.

"Very kind," echoed Mr. Aimes.

"Had the man left her then?" Mr. Puckle asked, with a twinge of his own conscience.

"That's what it was, you may be sure," said Miss Shand volubly. She told me a long rigmarole about a husband that she married in Ireland—whom she had brought over to England et cetera—but I never saw him. When I came to see her, he'd gone back to Ireland again."

"Ah, well—of course one has to say these things," said the sententious Puckle.

"I gathered that she was Irish," remarked his friend. "But she's a beautiful girl."

"Oh, do you think so, really?" said Miss Shand. "I suppose she is pretty; but beautiful——?"

"Beautiful—I think," persisted the artistic Aimes, in whose mind a herd of possibilities were upon the point of stampede. "You say she's awfully hard up?" he added.

"Penniless," said Miss Shand.

"Um! That's why she said it was kind of me."

"Why—what are you going to do?" the others asked in a breath.

"She's coming in the evening to sit for me—and I'm going to pay her."

"Oh, Wilfrid!" Puckle exclaimed, with an uplifted finger of reproof. "We all know what that means."

"Not at all—not at all," Aimes replied blandly. "You don't know what the craving to do artistic work is."

Stanley Puckle, fortunately for him, did not. He admitted as much by taking the remark as a rebuff. He said nothing.

Ten minutes later, when he began to feel that his presence was obviously unnecessary, Mr. Aimes rose to take his leave. He thanked Miss Shand for a very pleasant evening,

begged her to put nothing in the way of Nanno's coming to see him, and nodded to his friend.

When he had gone Miss Shand settled herself on to Mr. Puckle's knee.

"What did you mean by saying to him—'we all know what that means'?"

Puckle laughed. "Oh, we all know Wilfrid. He always ends up by living with the women he paints. They sort of grow into the idea of it."

"Do you mean he would keep her?"

"Of course."

"Well—she'll never get any work to do, and she's got to keep the child."

"But I thought she was living with you?"

"Yes—but I can't go on keeping her forever—can I?"

"No, of course not—of course not. I suppose we shall meet her next up in old Wilfrid's studio, sitting on the model's throne with that old Chinese dressing-gown round her, that every single one of 'em has worn. It 'ud fit anybody."

CHAPTER V.

There is no doubt about it that the starving man who steals a loaf to fill an empty stomach is a thief. There was also no doubt when, some weeks after the little party in Miss Shand's flat, Nanno might have been found sitting on the throne in Wilfrid Aimes' studio with the old Chinese dressing-gown around her, that she had become a woman of little count. Now, the law of Moses draws no distinction between the seventh commandment and the eighth; yet that man who, to assuage an hunger that is almost death, steals a loaf is judged to all intent to be justified. What then can be said of Nanno—heroine for so long through all these pages—now, a creature, passing whom, one should pull aside the hem or cross to the other path?

Nothing can be said that would be just, for what mind is there capable of administering justice in such a case? The priest of God points to his tablets of stone with the remark: "Here are my laws written." The good woman thinks of her virtue, the virtue which quite possibly she has rigidly maintained since last she sinned, and is ashamed. Justice only is possible from the man who was tempted in the wilderness. He, no doubt, who could see the virtue in the box of spikenard, would find virtue also in the prayers of Nanno that left her lips every night.

A quarrel with Miss Shand; an open door on the very evening when she was going to Aimes' studio for the fifth sitting—that was the climax. Events over the last few

weeks had been steadily leading up to it. Mrs. Hudson had written for some money. It was a generous letter, but it conveyed an absolute necessity. Aimes, hearing of it through Miss Shand, had scraped the money together from the lumber of his studio and paid it without Nanno's knowledge. Mrs. Hudson's letter of thanks which followed had shown her to whom she owed the obligation. After the third sitting she had discovered that Aimes was paying her extravagantly for her services. She told him of it, but he begged her to keep the money. Dire necessity compelled her to obey. Then he professed to take a great interest in the baby. He bought things for it. He asked her to bring it with her to the studio.

"How the deuce you can bear to hear that whining brat up here," Mr. Puckle said one day to him, "is more than I can understand."

"It's quiet enough," Aimes replied. "I don't mind it—she comes, you see."

The curse of his artistic temperament again deceived him. He thought that he could put up with it forever. He called it, for amusement, his adopted child. He thought that he liked to see it crawling about the studio floor. He pitied it for its white, pinched face. It did not occur to him that he was putting up with it in order to win Nanno. In the light of a seducer, he would not have recognized himself.

By the time that Nanno felt thoroughly indebted to him there came the break—the inevitable break—in her friendship with Miss Shand.

"I can't afford to go on paying for you," was Miss Shand's last remark. "That baby of yours is always keeping me awake at night. I wish to God you'd take it out of the house."

Nanno wrapped it up and took it with her to the sitting in Aimes' studio.

He saw no difference in her while she sat for her portrait. The brushes that he held in his hand smeared away just as hopefully as ever, and the passable portrait of Nanno grew slowly upon the canvas. He was making her look much older than she did. The expression of Fate, although she saw it every time, escaped the intelligence of his brush. There was nothing in the picture to recommend it. But he struggled on, believing that with every fresh daub of paint it would come. It never came.

When he had finished, he laid down his brushes and crossed the room to the row of pegs that had been attached to the wall.

"I'm going to see you home," he said, taking down his soft felt hat.

She looked up at him from the throne where she was still sitting, and then she broke down. He was going to see her home; but there was no such place for her. She could not go back and face Miss Shand. There still remained a sum of money which she owed to Mrs. Hudson. The sudden realization which, until that moment, she had been too dazed to perceive, now broke forth upon her bewildered understanding. There was her child to think of this time. She could not walk the streets as once she had done before. The moment had actually come now. She knew that she was about to take the lower groove from which it would be so difficult to rise again. She knew that this man would accept her—pay for her—keep her. It was because she realized that it had come to the moment when she must receive such protection, that she cried as though her heart were breaking.

In a moment he had thrown away his hat and was at her knees.

"What on earth's the matter?" he asked, amazed.

She shook the tears out of her eyes and stood up. There was a show of daring in her face; her lips were set tight. At last she was facing the fate that had crept at her heels from the moment when the English artist had won Bridget from herself. She was facing it, as she had faced Jamesy on the first occasion when he had struck her; as she had faced Mr. Mossop when he had tried to kiss her. Let it come—let it take her! It had waited long enough. There was only one person in the world who would care if he knew. She would not let his name enter her thoughts. Let it take her! It had played a waiting game better than she. This did not rob her of the grace of the Church. Repentance would not be so hard a thing when she hated herself for what she was about to do—even in the beginning of it. There would be infinite absolution for the man who stole the loaf; there would be infinite absolution for her. He was not a thief in mind; only in body. And so was it with her. She felt that if she went out into the streets, she could not fail to take her life. Work had been so impossible to obtain; she would not find the hope of it to bear her up then. For a moment she stood listening. A heavy shower of rain was pattering down on to the glass roof of the studio. She heard it rattle like little pebbles on the panes. If she were to go out into that, assuredly before morning broke she would have taken her life and her child's as well. The Church would not condone that. Murder and suicide! She put her hands up to her eyes and shivered.

"What's the matter?" repeated Aimes at her feet. "Don't you want to go back home?"

"I have no home," she said stoically. "I live nowhere. Miss Shand won't have me with her any more."

He raised himself quickly, like a hound that is freed

from the leash. The scent of the prey was in his nostrils—the end of the chase was in his eyes.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "has she turned you out?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know—walk about the streets." If he would not offer to take her, she knew it would be the end of everything. She began to plead that the vice would not fail him at the last moment.

"But you can't—it's pouring with rain."

"I've been out in the rain at night before now," she replied. The remembrance of that evening when she had first left Jamesy flashed across her mind. The whole picture—the night, black as ink; the dawn, sickly and gray—all came and went in a moment.

"But you can't go out with the baby to-night. You'd be dead in the morning."

"Where can I go, then?"

"Stay here—stay with me—always with me, Nanno.

She sat down on the model's chair again and laughed. The man had risen to the flesh—who could doubt it? Aimes felt the cold sweat on his hands when he heard her laugh.

"Why that?" he asked. "Why laugh?"

"I don't know."

"Don't you care for me enough? Haven't I tried enough to please you?"

"I don't know."

"Why do you keep on saying, 'I don't know'?"

She looked at him in silence. Her eyes blinked. For a moment she thought her reason was going.

"Nanno!" he exclaimed. He fancied that the protestations of his affection might bring her back into a more reasonable frame of mind. "Nanno, you'll stay with me.

Can't you see I've wanted this all along? That first night I saw you at Miss Shand's; do you remember I was just saying that nothing in this world was divine? Then I looked up and saw your face. Nanno, I thought you were divine then. I've thought so ever since. And then there's the baby"—he scrambled quickly to his feet and brought the creature from his bedroom, placing it on her lap. She sat there motionless on the throne. Lot's wife turned to a pillar of salt—turned to a model of cold, white clay—from the moment when she had looked in the eyes of her destiny.

"Here's the baby," Aimes went on, lifting up its tiny hand and waving it to her. "We'll take care of that—both of us. It's going to be our child."

The advent of this third person seemed to bring life into her. She stood up gripping the child in her hands and looking wildly into its eyes as though in the pale blue shallows she expected to find reason for all things. He watched her, fearing that she might do something rash in her desperation.

"Just we three," he said feebly; driveling whatever words came to his lips. He had a horror of tragedy, and felt on the brink of one. Another step, and the sheer edge was reached. He remembered his experiences with other women in hysterics. His reason started, ready to bolt with hers.

Still she stood there saying nothing. Had he been able to watch her eyes, he would have seen them growing more dazed, more and more lifeless. The suggestion that there, as she stood, was the study for a great picture—the mother of an illegitimate child—fled through his mind, not waiting to grip his real understanding, chased by a thousand hounds of fear that she was contemplating murder. He waited in readiness to seize her if she tried, all the time unconsciously swept with a passionate admiration for her as

she unwittingly posed on the model's throne. There was no doubt that he had mistaken his prey. He had thought her used to the game; playing only to be won. He found her sensitive, shy as a young colt in the field.

At last she looked round at him with a wonderful calm.

"You'd take the child—as well?" she asked in a distant voice.

"Yes—yes—haven't I said so?" He hurried forward. "Let me hold it for you—you're tired." He stretched out his hands, but she folded both her arms round the infant body and turned away.

BOOK VI.

THE END OF THE TRAFFIC.

CHAPTER I.

A YEAR had woven itself out on the loom of Time since that night of Nanno's despoiling. During all that period, even since last he had seen her, Jerningham had not altered his method of going. He was essentially a man to whom change is impervious. The iron had entered his soul when he left her. He wrenched it out, when he had seated himself to write that letter which—so long ago it seemed to both of them—she had received from Mr. Mossop's hands in the restaurant.

From that day he had become once more the inveterate bachelor. New friends he made and old ones left him to enter matrimony, a college where many graduate, where the cloisters are long and the time for meditation—lavish. Jerningham found that most of them disappeared. Only he was left remaining in the old place; but the strain of a deeper sentiment than he was aware of had grown into and maintained its hold upon his nature. In the first place, he had changed the position of one of his old armchairs, the one upon which he had seated Nanno when she came to have tea in his rooms. Where he had placed it on that day it was left and, by the side of it, he put the other seat that he had occupied.

Frequently when men came up to see him in the evening, they would look at the vacant chair pulled up towards the fire and ask him whether some one had been in and who it was. This is to say that those of his friends, possessed of

keener observation than the rest, had been known to put the question. He always answered in the same way.

"Yes, some one's been up here."

"Any one I know?" would follow.

"No—no, I shouldn't think so."

The matter usually dropped there.

Now clearly that was nothing but sentiment. Accused of it, he would have denied the charge—the more emphatically as time went on—with a certain amount of contempt for the accuser. Yet he never changed their positions, until in time the arrangement grew almost to be a habit. He could find them in the dark.

To a slight extent his affairs upon the Stock Exchange prospered, but he was never liable to become rich. His ambitions rose no higher than Plowden Buildings. Every Friday, four men came into his rooms for poker; unless the condition of the markets made them hesitate in front of a meal before they decided whether they could afford to sit down to it. On those evenings he lit his colossal wax candles in their barbaric sconces. With a certain amount of recklessness, he filled the brass lamps with oil. Directly he came in from dining at a neighboring tavern in Fleet Street, he stoked a fire that would have shamed the most generous of householders. A large German sausage, a loaf of bread, glasses, and an indigestible cake were laid on a small side table which, like most of the rest of his furniture, had fallen to his bidding in an auction-room, where only dust and dealers were ever to be found. More candles were lighted on the card-table—lighted in old brass candlesticks that come in their shiploads from Holland. New packs of cards were uncased, a box of vari-colored counters were produced; then, looking finally around the room to see if more were needed, he would go into his bedroom, returning arrayed in a dark blue

smock that would have lent disfigurement to the Apollo Belvedere. But the men who came for poker were no critics of appearances and, in any case, they took Jerningham as they found him.

This Friday in every week was an invariable institution. But beyond that he made his arrangements as they came. A client might dine with him one day; he might dine with a client the next. Occasionally he went to a theatre, usually by himself, but most of his nights were spent in chambers alone, where he read till midnight, and then retired.

One evening, as he was just preparing to go out to his tavern dinner, the brass knocker rattled on the inner door. He crossed the hall and opened it.

"Is that Sturgis?" he queried, peering out into the darkness of the landing. "By Jove, yes! Come in!"

Sturgis, a man who lived also in the Temple, yet of whom he saw but little from one year's end to the other, walked into the hall, laying his hat on a plaster bust that graced an oak cabinet. Jerningham removed it and followed him into the sitting-room.

"Have you dined?" he asked.

Sturgis shook his head.

"Well, come to Williams', I'm just going there to feed?"

"And what afterwards?" Sturgis was the essence of lethargy. He made a contract with every sentence which he used, that it should contain as few words as possible.

"I don't mind—do you particularly want to go anywhere?"

"Somewhat—been up in chambers every night this week."

"We'll go to the Regent, then."

"That'll do."

"In fact, what you would have suggested yourself?"

"Probably."

"Regent, then—come on!"

He waited for his friend to pass out on to the stairs; then he closed both the doors. The sound of their shutting echoed through the empty building and up the lane. In such a manner as this, Jerningham found occasional evenings accounted for. Sturgis was nothing but a companion with whom to eat his meal. After that night, he would probably not see him again for three, or even six months.

At Williams', a tavern that still clung to the old-time custom of high-backed benches, and a grill that was within sight of the diners, they conversed intermittently through their fare. Sturgis held some post on one of the newspapers, and was possessed of a varied experience which expressed itself in an abrupt form of speech that reminded one of head-lines. Once in a way, like this, his company was amusing to Jerningham. The same might be said of Jerningham with regard to Sturgis. Their grooves were too isolated for them ever to unite in a contact of sympathy. They had known each other for five years, and only on occasions such as these, did they meet—ships of the great trade, coming into a common port and for an hour or so laying up alongside each other, only to be separated immediately by a long voyage across foreign waters.

They sat over dinner for an hour, and when the saucer of the cup of coffee opposite Sturgis was littered with ash and the ends of cigarettes, and Jerningham's pipe had been knocked out against his heel to be refilled, they both rose. At a sign, an obsequious waiter hurried forward and helped them on with their coats.

"Good-night, gentlemen," he said.

"Good-night," they replied in chorus.

The Regent was its mass of lights. Every niche that held a space contained a light. Wherever a shadow might have fallen, an electric flame defied it. Like most places of modern entertainment, it depended heavily upon its brilliancy. Things genuine left the world in a body when the lantern was extinguished; things tinseled took their place when electricity began to dazzle the eyes. Only a real diamond will answer to the rays of a candle; the poorest performer that night at the Regent blazed with gems behind the modern footlights.

Sturgis and Jerningham took their seats in the back of the parterre, some distance from the rows of the white triangles of bare backs and shoulders. They were not in evening dress. Sturgis pulled affectionately at a heavy cigar.

For a while they kept their seats, watching the performance. A French chanteuse sang songs in broken English, making a hit with intentional mispronunciations. Following her was the unavoidable tramp musician, who got more applause when he played his instruments execrably than when he did his best. Jerningham yawned once or twice and, in an endeavor to conceal it from Sturgis, noticed that his friend's eyes were closed.

The last item before the Ballet were two Parisian dancers, male and female—according to the programme, husband and wife. The moment that they commenced their turn, men in the audience leaned forward in their seats and women raised their glasses. All the subtlety of French dancing was here condensed to one purpose. Never for a moment did it hesitate to convey its impression. In a gauzy dress that clung with every motion to her shapely figure, the woman struck her attitudes of defiant sensualism, and the audience cheered. In one of the

stage boxes a crowd of young men shouted vociferously, regardless of the fact that the rest of the audience was watching them. Some of them leaned out over the velvet rail and with flushed faces directed their applause to her very feet.

"We call ourselves moralists and point to the Folies Bergères," remarked Sturgis. "These people come over here because they can't get an audience like this in Paris. Where, on God's earth, except in England, would they turn an opera house into a dancing-den and hire boxes from which so-called respectable women may go and see their husbands dancing with the scum? Come and have a drink."

They ascended to the bar, where the files of women passed endlessly to and fro and the groups of English gentlemen linked arms and ogled them.

"Look at that!" said Sturgis.

Jerningham looked in the direction that he indicated. A gentleman and his wife were making their way to a box on the tier above the parterre. A young girl, evidently their daughter and not older than twenty, accompanied them.

"Here you can get life raw," went on Sturgis, "caught in the flesh and hanging from the ceiling, and a fond English father, who wouldn't permit his daughter to read the most abridged translation of a French classic, will drag that slip of innocence through the very shambles itself. The morals of the Englishman amaze me. He will shut his eyes to the truth, but he loves inordinately to find the occasion on which to shut them. You won't catch him avoiding the occasion—not likely. He likes to keep his eyes open till just the last moment—then shut them—snap! Like that." Sturgis screwed up his eyes with a grimace. "Then he imagines the rest."

"What's yours?" asked the unjournalistic Jerningham.

"Scotch—soda. But haven't you noticed that?"

Jerningham shook his head.

"I'm not of your observant type," he said quietly. "It's probably quite true——"

"Of course it's true," Sturgis affirmed. The absence of contradiction encouraged him. "Look at that everlasting phrase—one of the things that are better not talked about. Lord! The times I've heard that. 'But don't you think that that is one of the things that are far better left untalked of?' Great heavens! If that doesn't come into the catechism of the Prayer Book, which is dedicated to one of the kings of England, it ought to! What is your duty to your neighbor? My duty to my neighbor is to leave unsaid those things that ought to be said. I think I'll revise the catechism for the 'Leader'."

Jerningham smiled. "I would," he said, "if I were you, and when you've thoroughly mastered what it contains at present." His smile lingered on after his words, then suddenly was frozen from his lips. On a seat by herself, outside in the promenade, a girl was sitting disconsolately. His mind felt sick as he watched her. Up to that moment only her side face met his view, but when she turned his suspicion was confirmed. He recognized her. It was Nanno.

Sturgis swallowed his whisky, and turning saw Jerningham's face.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"You'll have to excuse me," said Jerningham abruptly. "I see some one I know. I'm sorry for running off like this."

"Thought I should have gone before you."

"So did I," Jerningham replied candidly. "Good-night."

His perturbed manner amazed Sturgis, who watched the reflection of his approach to Nanno in a mirror with which such places abound. Then he turned away with a sententious laugh. There was no accounting for the taste of any man.

CHAPTER II.

Before she had seen him, he had taken the vacant seat next to her and, even then, until she had turned in the first essay of making conversation, she did not recognize who he was.

"What do you think——?" of the performance, she was about to add.

"Nanno," said Jerningham.

For a moment she seemed to wither. He was watching her, and the recoil of her body from his side reminded him of the snail that is repulsed into its shell. In that brief instant, twenty years had swept across her face.

"Mr. Jerningham!" she whispered. From force of habit the words found their way to her lips. Still he looked at her and a troop of pictures, like a passing show, made passage across his mind. He saw her at every period of their acquaintance. He recalled her as when they had first met; blossoming, healthy womanhood, her cheeks tinged with the warmth of the sun, her hair the shadow of the brown earth, her eyes the gray of a deep evening sky. That was what she had been; this was what she had become. His eyes refocussed themselves upon the present, and he saw the pale, thin cheeks tinged with an artificial red, the earth-brown hair a shadow that no sun has lit, and her big, gray eyes, lusterless, somber, sad.

"Nanno," he repeated. He tried his utmost to believe that it was a mistake. He waited eagerly for her to tell

him that she did not answer to the name. He repeated it as a woman reading the casualty list of war repeats, for her assurance, the name of the dead.

"Oh, Mr. Jerningham," she said again. Then he looked away. The other women strolled past him with tightened skirts and swinging purses. This was the market-place. Life here, as Sturgis had said, was raw, caught in the flesh, hanging from the ceiling. The drip, drip, drip of honor and restraint sickened him. The air reeked of life putrescent. He turned back again to Nanno.

"We'll come out of this," he said steadily.

"Where?" she asked.

"Where do you live?"

"I can't go home with you," she said brokenly. This was the perfection of agony to her, that he should take her at once for what she was.

"But where do you live?" he persisted.

"You mustn't come back with me," she answered.

Jerningham frowned. He felt in no humor to play with the situation. Their surroundings did not call for a wasting of words; he felt impatient to be gone.

"This sort of dallying won't do, Nanno," he said firmly. "The sooner you tell me, the sooner we can get away from this." He rose to his feet. "Come along—oh, I assure you I don't intend that you should be a loser." A wave of bitterness had swept the words out of him. They stung her like pebbles that the sea slings in its rage.

Nanno looked up at his face and knew that she must obey. There had only been one thing in her life to which he had been unable to command her, and that, because she had fled from the sphere of his influence. In everything else she knew that she was dominated by him. Fiercely, heroically though she had clung through all trib-

ulation to the law of her Church—far more tenaciously than he would ever have done under similar circumstances—it was yet a clinging of fear. Her apparent strength had been her ultimate weakness. It had brought her to what he saw her then. And still, notwithstanding all, she clung to the iron handle of the open door of her creed.

They walked down the stairs together to the main entrance, saying nothing. A few turned and looked after them, thinking that they knew their destination. One woman with yellow hair swung her purse and raised her painted eyebrows.

Outside, Jerningham nodded to a hansom.

"What's the address?" he asked her again, for the third time.

She gave it to him submissively. He repeated it plainly to the cabman. Then they took their seats, and the cab pulled away from the curb into the traffic.

A little flat, one amongst a hundred others compressed into a row of buildings, was Nanno's abode. They climbed up the stone stairs with their iron railings, still saying nothing. Nanno walked two steps ahead. At the door bearing her number she stopped.

"Oh, don't come in, Mr. Jerningham," she pleaded, turning round to him piteously.

"Why?" He asked abruptly.

She tried to smooth out the tangle of her thoughts with her hand across her forehead.

"Can't you see it's not for men like you that I'm here? Oh, I couldn't!"

For a moment the inconsistency of her appeal came before the realization that she had not understood his intentions. The bitterness at finding her thus was becoming harder every minute to control.

"I can't follow you," he said, with intense quiet. "Why make an exception of *me?* You've got your trade to ply, irrespective of persons. Why hesitate at my soul?"

She shuddered.

"You said you loved me once," she replied.

Then he understood her inconsistency. A rush of sentiment sped through him. She could not treat him as other men, because he once had said he loved her; perhaps because she still loved him. There was no doubt about this being sentiment. He told himself so and shook it from him.

"I think you may as well open the door," he said unemotionally, "My motives in bringing you back are not what you take them to be. I'll stay only for a very short time, if you wish it."

She drew out her latch-key and opened the door obediently. In his mind's eye he saw the numberless times she had opened it so before, with a man hanging on her heels. Why had he come back with her at all? She had now cut herself adrift from him forever. Was it curiosity? Scarcely—such an instinct had no life in Jerningham. The dread he possessed in becoming intimate to any extent with the life that she was leading, offered no room for curiosity. He knew that he would be jarred by everything that he saw. Then once more, why had he come? A sense of pity for the condition of her life was one reason. A hope that there was yet salvation for her was another. He felt, or realized, no responsibility; but having once had all life in common with her, he could not bear to see her being run to earth. There was no absurdly sanctimonious idea in his thoughts when he regarded the situation. A course of training is required for a man to look direct to the welfare of a wo-

man's soul. The spiritual side of the matter did not occur to him. He only thought of the wretchedness of her life, the squalid misery of it. Once he had nearly claimed that life for himself. Once it had been his greatest interest. He could not afford to see it go under without an effort for the sake of what had, or might have been. These reasons, as he gave them to himself in answer to his own question, seemed reasonable enough—satisfactory; but they were not the intrinsic truth. The man who can tell himself the naked truth is no prey for the devil. Facts prove that there are few.

The truth was that Jerningham, once loving, loved always. His friends had not nicknamed him the bachelor without reason. A hard grain of truth lies at the bottom of every nickname, if only a schoolboy dubs it. Jerningham would have paced out his way, inevitably bachelor, if Nanno had not found him that day kneeling behind the hedge in John Troy's fields with a gun uncocked beside him. But once having found him and, in his nature, having roused that passion which he and his friends had believed to be non-existent, there was nothing in life that could absolutely quell it in its former state of nonentity. He loved her still. Honor, a sense of shame, a disgust of degradation, might offend him to the deepest foundations of his intellect. He might leave her forever and shut her out of the wanderings of his thoughts, yet there within him, apart from any intellect, duping all reason, would still continue to burn the secret fire that made its own existence and would not be put out. He succeeded in taking no notice of it. He clamped it down with the coldest reasoning and the most impenetrable aloofness. In time, no doubt, it would be choked with the fumes of its own consumption; but while it burned and so long as it burned, he presumed to ignore its presence.

Following her into the cramped passage from which opened the doors of the sitting-room and kitchen, he waited while she shut the outer door; then stood aside for her to pass him.

With a motion of habit, she switched on the electric light. In the dreaded expectation that he would find sordid and showy vulgarity upon the walls and all about him, he was mercifully disappointed. So far as that was concerned, the Nanno that he had once known had not changed. The walls had their plain, unimposing paper, the floor its unobtrusive carpet, the furnishing its ordinary chairs and table. The first impression that forced itself upon him was that she was poor and his heart asked him how she, with her gentle mind, could every ply the trade at all? He disdained an answer to the question. Yet there the fact was obvious. She was not successful. There was no sign of even the slightest attention that had ever been paid her. He could see it all—his heart helped him. She treated men coldly. She hated them one and all—of course she hated them—and could not conceal her hatred. And the result? They left her and they did not come again. There rose in his throat the choking pressure of pity for the awfulness of her life. Again he drove it back. She might have married him. He would have given her life that was fresh, clean, worth living. Instead, she had chosen this. Why should he pity her? He shut his heart as the watchman shuts the gates of a city at night, and left her shuddering outside—an outcast. All day long the gates had been open, from sunrise until sunset. If she had come sooner—it might have been different. What excuse was there for those who dragged their bodies out at night and then, thinking to find better shelter from within, knocked imploringly at the iron tracings? His heart reminded him that as

yet she had not knocked. She had begged him not to return with her. He accepted the reminder and tried to put aside the pack of thoughts that strained at the leash within him.

Walking across to the fireplace, he turned round to find her seated at the table with her head in her hands.

"Nanno," he said quietly, "you don't understand my motive in coming here, do you?"

She looked up with dry, tired eyes.

"No, I don't understand."

"You thought at first that I had come in the ordinary way, to add one to the list of the many?"

"I didn't know. I suppose"—she hesitated—"I suppose I don't suggest anything else. But I wouldn't have anything to do with you if you did. The men I see are not fit to touch the boots you wear. I loathe them. The only hope they can have is that they may come to loathe themselves, and loathe me too as much as I loathe myself."

"Then, good God! what made you come to this?"

The words were rent from him. Ever since he had seen her, the question had been seething in his mind. In one moment of reality it forced its way into expression, and from that moment, Nanno felt that sympathy in him was dead; a dried and withered leaf that the first footfall would crush into obscurity.

In the very beginning, when he had turned round to her from the fireplace, she thought she had seen the shadow of his old interest, his old concern for her welfare. Had that tone in his voice continued, she would have told him everything; unfolded to him that piteous picture of her downfall. Within the telling and an hour, she would have drawn from him the pity of his love. He could not have withheld it. Only from those whose moral virtue seems to them triumphant, could forgiveness have been

held back. But now his question and the sound of his voice drove her within herself; frightened her into the reticence of her own mind. She knew that she could tell him nothing. If he poured the vitriol of his contempt upon the aching heart that throbbed so listlessly her pulses, she knew that she must let him remain ignorant until the end.

"I don't ask it out of curiosity," he went on, strangled, tortured with the astringency of his own bitterness. "I suppose God knows how many men haven't dug with a spade in the mud to find that much from you. I ask because of what I knew you once to be. Why? Lord! isn't there a sufficiency of trades for women to ply without coming to this. Why did you, Nanno? Why did you?"

"One has to live," she replied quietly.

"Has to live! Come, I am not such a fool, that I can't take that for granted. Weren't you living in a certain amount of comfort when I saw you last? Why couldn't you stick to that? Discontented? Eh?"

"I was dismissed."

He looked swiftly at her; let his eyes burn into hers. So a hawk looks at a passing swallow.

"Why?"

She did not answer.

"Why were you dismissed?" he repeated suspiciously.

She would not reply. She was watching once more the expulsion of Annie Foley, from Rathmore, in a dark, distant pool of her memory. The incident stood out with that hazy distinctness which leaves so much to the imaginative remembrance. Now she understood the quality of human mercy.

"I suppose I must draw my own conclusions," he said, baffled. "It's not so very difficult a thing to do as you might suppose. The hawk had you. What a simple

prey you were! Good God! The world's full of hawks. And you—oh, I can see it plainly enough! You flew too gently ever to escape. I sometimes wonder that, whether you could escape in a quick pursuit, more relentless than mine."

She could not follow what he was saying. She did not know what he meant. Cornered thus, and stung to bitterness, a man uses the best of his intellect to stand high above the woman.

"Why didn't you come to me," he asked.

"I couldn't." She understood him now.

"In that last letter I wrote you, I told you that everything I had was yours."

"I wouldn't take from you what I couldn't pay back," was her answer.

"And so you chose this?"

She covered her face again with her hands.

"So you chose this?" he continued relentlessly. "You found this preferable to marrying me, to taking my name? You thought this better than facing a few cut-and-dried opinions with my hand to hold you? Ogh! And I could have made you happy—made us both happy—you knew I could."

"Yes—I knew."

"Then why wouldn't you choose to marry me instead of this?"

"I couldn't marry you."

"Because you would have been excommunicated?"

"Because the Church would have shut its doors against me." Even still she clung to Father Mehan's simile. "Because I should have been denied the rites of the Church."

"My heavens! Aren't you denied them now?"

"No."

"You go to church?"

"Yes."

"How do you go to confession?"

"I don't go."

"Then you're denied that?"

"No—for the sin I do, I deny that to myself. How could you know what that means to me? I could go to confession to-morrow, if I wished."

"Then why don't you?"

"Because—because I still live here; must live here until I have saved enough to keep me and—and—to keep me."

"And what?"

"To keep me," she repeated.

Even that did not move him to pity. The poison of the thought that he had lost her for this, still found substance to consume.

"I positively fail to see the benefits of your position," he said drily. "You can go to church, but there is no forgiveness for your sins. You can't go to confession."

"But I shall do," she replied.

"When? When?"

"When I can call myself free. I pray to God every night to keep me alive till then."

She uttered it triumphantly. In the childish arrogance of her faith, she saw right and reason, logic and force, in all she said. It went differently with him. The British instinct stood amazed at such profession.

"You think God takes your life of sin, prolonged until it should suit you to put an end to it?" he exclaimed. "You think God would take that in preference to the unsullied, unsoiled life that you would have lived with me? You think He takes you still tarred from the cauldron of vice, whensoever you choose to step out of it, rather than

have you clean as I would have kept you with the love that only you have ever made in me? It's childish—it's mad!"

She shuddered as though a cold wind had struck her.

"It's what I believe," she said fearfully. "It's what I'm told to believe."

He turned away, lest he should say worse.

"So you've saved your soul by steeping yourself in this," he said, after a pause. "You married a man who was not fit to call any woman his wife. The Church married you. The priest knew who he was marrying you to. He turned out what might have been expected of him. He drank away your living. He beat you almost to death. He was unfaithful. You come then here to London. You leave him, sooner than be murdered. So far there's logic, because there's life. What happens then? You meet me. I ask you to marry me. I, whom God meant that you should meet and marry. You say it is impossible. You point to the law and excommunication of the Church. To save you from that, I leave you, only to find that you have chosen this—this life—this hell on earth. And you tell me God prefers it to the life you would have led with me."

"I believe that I can receive forgiveness. There is not one moment when I could say I have not sinned. I say it every night."

"Yet still you sin?"

He sank down into a chair and looked glassily at the unburned coals that lay piled in the grate. Nanno sat at the table and her teeth chattered involuntarily.

Jerningham looked round.

"You ought to have this fire alight," he said.

She closed her eyes. The words reminded her of another time. Endurance had almost reached its limit.

"Will you light it?" she said inertly.

He took out his match-box and, striking a light, knelt down to apply it to the paper. There came a pause of silence while the blue flames licked round the bars; then the sticks caught and crackled like hail on a window-pane. Jerningham looked about for a shovel, a tongs with which to put on more coals. There were no fire-irons; only the half-filled coal-box. He turned to Nanno, but her face was imprisoned in her hands. A moment later she looked up and saw him feeding the fire from the coal-box with coals that he carried in his fingers.

"Wait," she said. "I'll get a tongs."

"Doesn't matter now," he replied. "I've done."

He stood up once more and they talked again. A clock in the distance of the city struck the half-hour after midnight.

"I'm keeping you up," he said.

She shook her head.

"If you'll excuse me for a moment," she said, rising. He rose formally as well and stood aside as she went out into the passage, passing into the kitchen. When she returned, her face was patched with white. The faint applications of rouge stood out glaringly. Jerningham watched her, and thought of the ballet they had left behind at the Regent. Death in the face of a ballet-girl would not have looked more gruesome than Nanno did then.

"You've made your hands black with the coals," she said vacantly. "Would you like to wash them?" She crossed the room to the other door. "You can wash them in my bedroom if you like."

He was just about to accept her suggestion when he stopped. She read the look of repugnance in his eyes. She understood why he had thought of it and she had not.

"I prefer them black," he said hardly.

She closed the door again. Her pulse then was beating like some exhausted animal that battles feebly with the waters that are dragging it surely down. The light in her had almost burned out. She felt it guttering like a wax candle.

The same clock in the distance chimed the hour of one. Then Jerningham buttoned up his coat.

"I mustn't keep you up any longer," he said. He sorted out all the gold that he had in his pocket, and laid it quietly on the mantelpiece. From long-accustomed habit, her eyes had followed his actions and, seeing him, the light in her flickered up with a glare; the last spurt of the guttering candle. She swept the money from its resting-place and brought it to him.

"This is yours," she said.

Jerningham turned towards the door.

"I've occupied your time, which might otherwise have been valuable. I look upon it in that light. If you're not foolish, you'll do the same."

She fronted him pleadingly.

"Take it back," she whispered. "Mr. Jerningham, take it back. No one would have come home with me to-night. I counted the burned and unburned matches in the match-holder, and I knew they wouldn't."

He looked at her in amazement.

"Oh, don't make me take it!" she persisted. "I—I—it isn't mine."

"I prefer to pay for the piper whether he plays or not," he remarked as he reached the door.

She let the sovereigns tumble out of her hand. They fell with a glitter and metallic tinkling on the floor. Jerningham took no notice. He opened the door.

"Good-night," he said hesitatingly.

She stood there motionless. Only a pale, dead glimmer of the light was left. Then a sound broke upon their ears—a sound that leaped into the silence: the choking cry of a child. It lifted—lifted—lifted to a pinnacle; then fell gutturally into nothing.

Jerningham looked at her.

"Ah," he said—his teeth bit the words. "You save enough to keep yourself 'and'—that is your 'and.' Whenever a woman's run to earth, you'll find a child with her. That is your 'and.' Good God!"

He slammed the door.

For an instant Nanno swayed like a toppling rock. Then she rushed into the kitchen, across its uncarpeted floor, to where a little cot stood in the shelter of the range. Everything was quite still. A pair of thin, white, emaciated hands lay without shape upon the coverlet. The eyes were closed, the mouth stretched open like an ugly wound. There was a smut on the baby's cheek. For a moment she could see only the black, broad smut that had risen from the kitchen fire. Then her eyes took in death, and she screamed.

CHAPTER III.

A MAN was hoseing the empty street when Jerningham descended the stone steps and came out again into the night. The volumes of water gushed out from the pipe, cooling the air, so it seemed, with its icy torrents, and sweeping away all refuse and dirt with its flood into the gutter. The sight refreshed him. It felt as though the cleansing water also purged his mind. He lifted up his face and let the cold air play on it. Then, as he walked, he took off his hat, carrying it in his hand. It was the hygiene of the mind he sought for. His whole soul was infected with the moral disease of what he had just beheld, and that man hoseing the street was an antiseptic impression that he welcomed readily. There were some left who strove for cleanliness! Some left who would purge the filth of the streets into the gutter!

In such a manner as this is the judgment of human nature warped by the limitations of its own personal bias. No man, no woman, can see beyond the weapon which inflicts the wound upon their pride. Jerningham's point of view was excusable in that all the world, but personally concerned, would have felt the same. He had been slighted, he had been spurned. The love that he had offered Nanno, a deep and glowing sentiment, far-reaching, unassailable, had been rejected for the bartering of the market-place. She had shut the gates of a man's love in order to keep open the doors of the Church. And not that alone, but for its justification he had been told that by so doing she re-

served herself the ultimate absolution of God. Such logic had maddened him. Each answer that she had given to his questions had been a goad tipped with some smarting poison that filtered through his veins and stung his mind to passion.

That for such a belief, for such a credence, the hope that he had held and the love that he had learned should, like a fagot, be snapped across the knees of an implacable law, devoid of logic and bereft of mercy, was more than his reason could accept. He raged against it; an impotent prisoner beating with bruised knuckles the bars of his cell.

Why should such a law, made by those with whose sympathies he had no share, be given existence, to wreak such havoc in his life? He derided the law. He cursed it. He thanked God bitterly, as a man who brushes the touch of another from his coat, that though it had robbed him it had left him clean. That was consolation.

Then what of Nanno? It had robbed her too; despoiled her of everything and left her shuddering in the stagnant pool of loathsome weed that no animal would touch and no man would cleanse. With a giant effort he turned his mind to contemplate what might be her point of view which, try as he might, he knew he could never fully grasp. Yet the circumstances, the conditions, they were obvious to the most casual eye. He could not fail to see them and, with a nobleness of generosity, he put his own grievances aside to study her piteous position.

She was poor; that told its story more plainly than any declaration of hers. Her instincts for the pursuit of such a trade were all at variance with the trade itself. How could they have been otherwise? The gentleness of such as Nanno could make no fight to secure the flesh that is thrown from the tables of life. She had refused the

money which he had offered her. That alone would stamp her incompetence. Her hand should be open for the drunkard as well as for the fool. What could she hope to do with fingers that closed, sensitively clutching upon emptiness, rather than take from one what was not her due? Never mind what she did with it afterwards; how lavishly she spent it or how generously she gave it away; the minted gold she must know how to take, and that for service ill or good, before she could hope to make her way at such a trade. But she did not know. A piteous picture of her unfittedness, a sorry impression of her desolation, as he had seen her sitting in the Regent, rose up on the receptive fiber of his mind.

Perhaps he had spoken harshly to her. Perhaps his words had cut more than he meant them to. In that atmosphere and in those surroundings, tainted with the heated breath of other men, he had forgotten that he was speaking to Nanno—Nanno, who had driven back the ambling cattle in the hush of the evening; Nanno, who had milked them in their stalls with her gentle head laid against their warm flanks, while the milk hissed into the pail.

He slackened his footsteps—then he stopped.

They had been harsh words to use to her. Would she forgive him? Conscience was smiting him a little, stinging switch. He turned back, retracing his steps; and, as he walked, the stinging switch smarted more and more, driving him at length to long, swinging strides that rapidly covered the ground over which he had passed.

He did not prepare in his mind the words he would say to her. No exact attitude had suggested itself for him to adopt, unless it were that of sympathy. He left it entirely to circumstance and to the moment as to what he should advise her to do. That she must give up the life

that she was leading was the first and most obvious fact for accomplishment. If some other means of subsistence were put in her way, he did not imagine that she would be hard to persuade. No doubt had ever entered his mind that the pressure must have been great indeed to drive her to such an extremity of life. How deeply it spoke then of her great respect for him, that she had never approached one whom she knew loved her, for support. The thought sped warmly like wine through his blood. That at least, in the midst of all her degradation, bespoke a greatness of heart that was almost worthy of nobility; and, virtue though she had none, a prey to the lusts of men as she was, he looked up to her for that. Other women would not have done the same. They would have written their whining letters and licked the flap of the envelope with a calculating tongue. Nanno had been above that; and it touched his admiration for the greatness of life.

From all this it may be seen that Jerningham was no mere conventionalist. For so long had he moved in an atmosphere unbiassed by any narrow social law, for so long had he been accustomed to look to his own reason for judgment upon matters, rather than rely on the influence of unyielding moral codes that, when he came to regard the case of Nanno Troy, apart from those bitter personal feelings which had driven him in the beginning, his standpoint was one that would no doubt irrevocably offend the British matron and draw from the lips of the paterfamilias such remarks as "Lax!" "Rotten to the core!" "Not the right way to judge a loose woman."

The shockingness of sin is so potent an influence on the world at large, that there are many who prefer to shut their eyes to it and do nothing, disregarding the fact that the very foundation of Christianity bases itself upon the point that we are one and all, indiscriminately of persons, born with that, rather than original virtue, in our

natures. Inasmuch as Jerningham was outside the pale of these chicken-hearted people of whom the philosopher Nietzsche said, "There was only one Christian, and He died on the Cross"; so the shockingness of Nanno's immorality had no power to deter him from regarding the just view of her case. She must be saved, and he was returning to save her.

In another moment or so he came in sight of the block of buildings from which he had departed in so different a frame of mind but half an hour before. The servant of the corporation had disappeared; the road was swept and garnished. In the little puddles of water that had found existence in the uneven hollows of the wood pavement the reflections of the gas-lamps twinkled like pieces of glass. The jingling bells of a hansom in the distance irritated the heavy silence. There was not a soul in sight.

He was scarcely more than a hundred yards from the main entrance to the building, when the black figure of a woman emerged from the yawning patch that he knew to be the doorway. A dark shawl was wrapped around her shoulders, bulging disfiguringly at her side, as though beneath it she were carrying an ungainly parcel.

It was natural enough that his first thoughts should fly to Nanno, before he had absolute proof of recognition. So convinced was he of her identity that, instead of entering the block of buildings and going first to find whether she was in, he crossed to the other side of the street and, keeping close within the shadow of the shops, he hastened his steps until she was near enough for identification. The next lamp-post under which she passed convinced him. It was Nanno. What was she doing? Where was she going at that unearthly hour of the night?

She walked unswervingly; looked neither to the left hand nor to the right. A set purpose seemed to be guid-

ing her. When she took a turning, it was unfalteringly. Her destination was obviously fixed. The steps she took were not hasty. Had he not known it to be impossible, he would have declared that she was walking in her sleep. Once she hesitated. He stopped immediately. He thought she was about to turn back; then he saw that it was merely in order to ease the weight of the bundle which she carried under her shawl. When that was settled to her satisfaction, she hurried on more quickly than before.

They entered Trafalgar Square from St. Martin's Lane, Nanno keeping to the left pavement, passing by the long steps of the church, Jerningham still following his course, walking on the opposite side.

The statues under the shelter of the Column rose up into the darkness like black shadows which the night has brought to rest. Jerningham passed them unseeingly, his eyes fixed on Nanno's hastening figure which, in that vast open space, looked so pathetically alone.

When she came to the post-office she turned unhesitatingly into the Strand. Jerningham followed. Only at the station of Charing Cross, where the railings separate the courtyard from the road, did he stop. Through them the light was falling conspicuously. He waited in the shadows until she would have passed far enough ahead not to recognize him as he crossed the open space. He was just about to move on, when she crossed the street and disappeared down Villiers Street, that leads to the Embankment.

For a moment his heart was jolted with a thought, and the next instant he had covered the distance between him and the top of the street in long, eager strides. When he turned the corner, she was scarcely thirty paces ahead of him; but here the light was faint and intermittent,

and the thought that had leaped into his brain was still revolving like a windmill in a gale. He did not pause to let her increase the distance; his long strides if anything diminished it. She kept her way continuously, making directly towards the underground railway station at the bottom. Before she reached it, she turned sharp to the right.

"God!" said Jerningham under his breath, and a chilling sweat rushed to the surface, damping, soaking even into his clothes. She had mounted the steps to Hungerford Bridge.

Now again she was out of sight and, like a bloodhound drawing the burning scent into its nostrils, his legs stretched out into a creeping run, bringing him to the bottom of the stone stairs as he heard her turn the first corner.

There he stopped. Was he a fool? What was it to him? Was it the hour of night and the witches of darkness just playing a game of havoc with his thoughts? The kind of life she now led might reasonably bring Nanno out upon some vicious errand at this time of night. Supposing he stopped her and found that his fears had fooled him? All this might reasonably be. But in the recesses of his mind hung the memory of the harsh words that he had used to her; hung there, as the black cap of the judge hangs limply on its nail, reminding him of death. Fool or no fool, he could not bear it and, taking two steps at a time, he continued the pursuit.

When he reached the top she was some yards away on the narrow bridge. Below her, in the muddy water, gleamed like a gauntlet of dancing eyes the reflections of the Embankment lights. Nothing was moving on the river. As far up as the next bridge all was sleeping water.

He dared not take his eyes off her. And now he was walking upon the tips of his toes. Fate seemed marvelously to be conspiring with her, if that indeed were her purpose, for no one was to be seen.

Once or twice as she walked, now more slowly, more deliberately, she paused and looked over the handrail beneath. At length she stood still and, even then giving to Jerningham that impression of somnambulism, she put her hands on the wooden rail as though to raise herself.

For the man of action that was more than enough. With her name on his lips he bounded forward, a power of saving life shot from the bowels of a machine.

With a spasmodic twist of her head, she looked round. Then, hastily, she put her foot upon the ironwork. A little moan crushed a way out of her lips. The foot slipped. With a colossal effort she tried again, impeded by the bundle that she held; but this time, raising her body to the waist above the rail, she was on the verge of overbalance when he came within her reach.

She was lost—perhaps there was no doubt that she was lost—but this was death. He made a vice of his arms and held her there.

As a rabbit that writhes between the iron teeth of a trap, she struggled in his arms.

"Let me go!" she cried. "Let me go! I don't want to live! I can't live!"

The awful blasphemy of the words made his muscles strain and crack.

"You're not going, Nanno," he said, with intense and breathless quiet. "There's more life yet—better than what there has been."

She struggled again, more feebly than before.

"What have you got here?" he asked, feeling the bundle with her in his arms.

She did not reply. From having struggled, her body quivered like a blade of grass that the wind plays with.

"What have you got here?" he asked again. He pulled aside the edge of the shawl. The sightless, glazed eyes of a baby met his; its face was blue—cold—dead.

A nauseous sensation that he had arrested the natural course of a woman distraught with crime, flooded his mind—an oozing liquid that swamped him with sickly impotence.

"How—how did this happen?" he asked. This was the child who an hour before had lived and thrilled them both with its ugly cry.

"How did it happen?" he repeated.

"When you left——" the words chattered almost inaudibly between her teeth.

"Yes: when I left—it was alive—I heard it cry."

"That cry was its last. I found it dead—in the kitchen. I had nothing else—what could you expect? I'd been living for that."

"Where's its father—do you know him?"

"My husband."

Jerningham made an effort to understand.

"When?" he asked.

"After—after I left the Fulham Road."

Just those few words painted a picture with a coarse and hurried brush to which only the distance of time lent perspective. He saw the picture, thrust for the moment under the light. Whether the details were correct or not he did not hesitate to consider. He saw the picture.

Then slowly his arms bound round her tighter—a force that seemed life without sentiment. He put his face against her face—he shuddered—then he kissed her.

THE END.

